

The Gospel

Here is the text of the Gospel Message I gave during Greenwood Boys' Camp 2013:

The Creation of the Gospel

What does "gospel" mean? "Good news", right? Where does the the "gospel", the "good news" start? It actually starts with some pretty bad news. For us to understand the good news, we must first understand the bad news. So, what's the bad news? Where does the bad news start? Let's go back, way back . . . before time began.

"In the beginning . . . God." (Genesis 1:1)

This is how the Bible begins. It is the only record of what happened before anything "was". How can that be?! God wrote it!

"All Scripture is given by inspirations of God." (2 Timothy 3:16)

God was there before time began. God inspired 40 different men from all walks of life, over a period of 1500 years, on 3 different continents, in 3 different languages, in many different literary styles, through good and bad times, to write the one consistent record of God's interaction with and plan for His most special creation: you and me! This record has stood the test of time. It has survived numerous attempts to destroy it. It is still "alive and active" (Hebrews 4:12) and extremely relevant in an age when very few people subscribe to any sort of absolute truth. Truly, "the grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8)

It begins with no convincing argument for the existence of God, just: "God". And what does God do? God creates! The vast void of the universe, the earth, light, water, land, plants, the sun, moon and stars, sea creatures, air creatures, land creatures, and to top it all off, God creates man! Not, "according to its kind", as with the sea, air and land creatures, but rather, "in God's image, according to God's kind". (Genesis 1:26)

Let's be very clear: God created out of nothing! There were no pre-existing materials, gases or particles floating around. Nothing randomly collided. Nothing just happened slowly over time. God deliberately and purposefully spoke and it came into existence. And guess what? It was good!

“Everything God had made, indeed, was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

Let's be very clear about another thing: God wrote the book of Genesis through the hand of His prophet, Moses. It is not an allegory, a metaphor or just a really nice Sunday School story with some happy “God loves you” spiritual lesson. All of this actually happened! I prefer to call it the creation “account”, not “story”, to reinforce the reality of the recorded history of the beginning of all things. God's Word is not a history textbook and it is not meant to be. But, what it says regarding history is 100% absolutely true. God does not lie. God's Word is not a science textbook and it is not meant to be. But, what it says regarding science is 100% absolutely true. God does not lie.

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.” (Job 38:4)

Let's get back to the historical narrative: Then God put the perfect first man and the perfect first woman in the perfect first garden and abundantly gave them everything that they needed to live and take care of God's perfect creation. God set them up for absolute success!

He also gave them a choice. For the man and woman to show God that they appreciated all of what He gave to them, and to prove that their love for Him was genuine and not forced, God gave them a choice. A choice to simply obey and live or a choice to selfishly disobey and die.

“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:16,17)

Simple, right? “If you love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) And what did they do? Did they obey and live happily ever after? No! It didn't take them too

long to get a little curious. Of all the places they could've been, why were they hanging out by that tree?

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.”
(James 1:13-15)

And that is exactly what happened! God didn't tempt them to failure, God was testing them to success, to prove their devotion to and love for God alone. They were drawn away from God by their own selfish desires, Satan comes along and capitalizes on those desires – enticing them to doubt God's Word, God's character of goodness; “Did God actually say?” (Genesis 3:1)

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband (who was) with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”
(Genesis 3:6-8)

God had “set before them life and death” (Deuteronomy 30:19) and urged them to “choose life.”

But, “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”
(Proverbs 14:12)

So, even with everything in their favor, everything “very good” going for them, they still chose their own way, to disobey God and die. Their choice separated them from God. This is spiritual death, “living” without God.

“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)

God's perfection, God's holiness has absolutely no part with darkness.

“Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” (John 3:19,20)

The man and woman hid from God. They chose separation from God, and their selfish choice changed everything! They no longer had free and open access to their Creator. Having children would not be an entirely enjoyable experience. The land would no longer easily and abundantly produce food for them on its own. Just as God warned, they were going to die: their originally created perfect eternal bodies were now subject (as also the whole of creation (Romans 8:22)) to futility, decay and eventual physical death. And finally, they were thrown out of the perfect garden that God had made for them.

Sounds pretty bad, right? Oh, wait, it gets worse!

“Adam called his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And Adam begot sons and daughters in his own likeness, after his image.” (Genesis 3:20 & 5:3,4)

You and I, we, are those sons and daughters. We are in Adams likeness and image of sin and death.

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” (Psalms 51:5)

“Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12)

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory (the light, perfection, holiness) of God.” (Romans 3:23)

“The wages (payment, reward, consequence) of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

“They are all under sin, there is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who does good, no, not one.” (Romans 3:9-18)

“For I know that in me nothing good dwells.” (Romans 7:18)

That is the bad news: separated from God by one man's sin. Do you actually think for a second that you or I would've done anything differently?! We are separated from God by our own sin, our own disobedience, our own rebellion, on our way to our just reward: death!

Ok, are you ready for the "good news"? Where were the man and woman? Hiding! Clothed in leaves! Hiding from their Creator! And here it is: "Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him: 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9)

"I have surely seen the oppression of My people, and have heard their cry, for I know their sorrows, so I have come down to deliver them." (Exodus 3:7,8)

"You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth." (Psalms 86:15)

God knew exactly where they were. God knew exactly what they had done. "Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?" says the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:24)

God was reaching out to them, graciously extending His arms to bring restoration. There were going to be consequences for the man and woman's disobedience, but even within the curse, God placed a great promise: there would be a Man, born of the woman generations later, who would come. The serpent, Satan, would bruise His heel, but that promised Offspring would bruise the serpent's head – a fatal blow! This is the first promise, the first prophecy, of the One who would come and "save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

Not only did God reach out to sin-wrecked man, and not only did God promise a future Deliverer, but God also removed their fig leaf clothing, their futile effort to cover their sin and shame, and "God made tunics of skin and clothed them." (Genesis 3:21) Wait?! Where did God get the skin? Remember the consequence of disobedience? To meet God's just demand for sin, something had to die. Imagine for a moment: God killed one of His perfect innocent creatures right in front of the man and the woman. The man had just named that animal a short time ago and now God had to kill it to make clothes for them to cover their sin and shame. Never had anything died before this! This was the first blood sacrifice to pay for the sin of

man. God instituted a way by which man could stand again before Him with sin forgiven.

“Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (Hebrews 9:22)

From this point on, through much of the history recorded for us in the Bible, there is a literal bloodbath of animal sacrifices needed to cover man’s continued sin. Until something much better than sacrifice came along: obedience!

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.” (1 Samuel 15:22)

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19)

“It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come – in the volume of the book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God.’” (Hebrews 10:4-7)

The obedience to God by one Man, the promised Offspring of the woman, Jesus Christ, came! And just in time!

“When we were still without strength, in due time (at the right time) Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6-8)

Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross, as that innocent Lamb of God, fully paid for our sin, our disobedience to God. Like the fig leaf clothing, our futile efforts, our good works, our righteousness will never make us right before God.

Christ’s death was the heal bruising by the serpent, but Christ did not stay dead!

“But now Christ is risen from the dead. For since by man (Adam) came death, by Man (Christ) also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

The fatal head bruising is coming. As promised, Christ will have absolute victory. As John details future events yet to occur in the book of Revelation:

“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, and will be tormented day and night forever and ever. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:10,15)

But, “the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” (Matthew 25:34)

“‘And behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.’ Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.” (Revelation 22:12-14)

So here we are. You know the bad news, and you know the good news. You know the beginning and you know the end. Just like the first man and woman, you have a choice. That choice is very simple: obey and live, or disobey and die.

“‘What shall we do that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” (John 6:28,29)

“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:9,10)

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

You may be lost in the darkness of you sin. You may be purposely hiding there, in your shame, from your Creator. Know this: God is actively and graciously reaching out to you right now! Just come to Him, obey by believing in Jesus, and live!