

## **GOD SAVES – Part 1 (Genesis 3; Luke 19:1-10) Becky Douglass**

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We are almost finished with our overview of our amazing God! At the Grace Group on Thursday, Bob said that one of the things which has impressed him during this study is just how big and complex God is, and he is right. Over the past couple of months, we have just scratched the surface of all there is to learn about God. I am aware of all the things I have left out that I really wanted to talk about. But I hope that this overview will give you a framework that you can fill in as you learn more about Him. All we've done is draw a black outline – now you can fill in the colour!

We started out by looking at who God is in Himself. We looked at what kind of being He is and then explored His character - God is Love and God is Good. These things have been true about God from eternity past and will be true into eternity future. This is who God is.

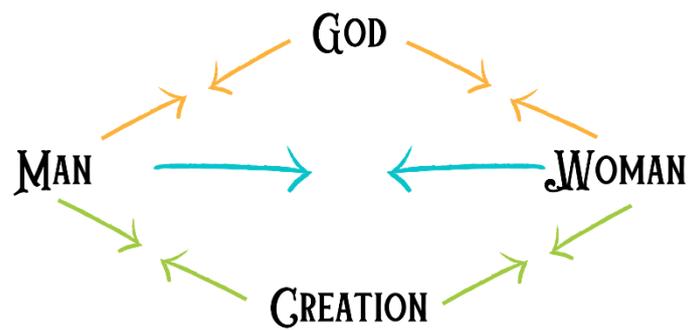
But we've also been seeing that because this is who God is, He has chosen to relate to us in certain ways. Because God is so glorious, we can only know Him because He reveals Himself to us. And we are here, in this beautiful world, because He has chosen to create all that exists. The Trinity decided to create you and I and the world in which we live in order to spread the love that they have within the Trinity. Adam and Eve were created to live in God's love and be an expression of His goodness.

### **God's Shalom**

When we get to the end of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, all is very good and working together as God has planned. This is a picture of what the Bible calls '*shalom*'. In the Bible, the Hebrew word *shalom* means: "The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in universal flourishing, wholeness and delight. In other words, the way things ought to be." (Cornelius Plantinga) This is a word used throughout the Bible to express God's desire for His people. We can see Him building this web of relationships in these first two chapters.

First, we see God creating humanity in His image, to live in relationship with Him. Nothing came between God and humanity and we see them talking and working together to rule and care for all of creation. As they do this, creation provides all that they need. It is a mutually beneficial relationship.

God creates both man and woman and brings them together to help and support each other. They are not just 'work-mates' however, they become as close as any human can be to another – they are 'one flesh'. We see the depth of this union when it says that "they were naked and unashamed". Nothing came between them.



As I read these chapters, I find myself longing to be there with them don't you? They knew our amazing God personally and completely. They lived in a perfect creation. They enjoyed an intimate relationship with each other. And their work in the Garden of Eden gave them a fulfilling purpose. This life was the natural reflection of a perfect, loving, and good God.

### **Sin and the Destruction of *Shalom***

I long for this life because what I know is very different. In my own heart, I do not know *shalom* as my sinful tendencies war against what is best for me. As I look around at the created world, although it is still beautiful and amazing in many ways, it is hurting and does not know *shalom*. As I look at human society, I do not see *shalom* but crime and corruption, suffering and injustice.

As we look at this difference, we ask, "Why? Why did God allow it to change? Why did he give a choice to Adam and Eve? Wouldn't have been to their benefit if they couldn't choose anything other than God?"

However, without this choice, they could not have a loving relationship with God – or each other. What makes love so wonderful is this aspect of choice. My husband chose to love me when we got married And he continues to choose to love me – me and no other. Knowing myself the way I do; I think this is amazing! It is part of why I choose, in turn, to love him.

Without choice, love would cease to have value. Their freedom to choose was an important part of Adam and Eve's relationship with their Creator. However, in creating beings with whom he could have a real relationship, the possibility of choosing against Him would always exist.

So, understanding this, we turn to Genesis 3 to discover what happened and we come across one of the most puzzling verses in the Bible: *The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman ... (Genesis 3:1)* Wait a minute - a talking serpent? How are we supposed to understand this? Down through the ages, people have had different explanations. I believe that we are given a hint on how to understand this if we go to the end of the Bible where it says:

*This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels. (Revelation 12:9)*

Here we see the serpent connected to Satan. Satan was the highest angel created by God. But he wasn't happy to serve God. He wanted to be God and so he rebelled against Him and incited other angels to follow him in his rebellion. God threw Satan and his angels out of heaven, limiting their power. Satan then decides to hurt God by

turning humanity, against Him. Whether he took the form of a serpent, or somehow spoke through a serpent, or something else happened, what we do know is that here we see Satan out to deceive and destroy humanity – the centre of God’s love and care.

As he begins this process, he asks a question which sounds innocuous enough: *“Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”* (Gen 3:1). But as Eve starts to correct his information, she falls into Satan’s trap. The serpent is getting Eve to look at God and evaluate Him. And in doing so, a slight hint of doubt seems to enter her mind. God had said they shouldn’t eat of the fruit of the tree. He never said they couldn’t touch it. What she says about God is not totally accurate and makes the prohibition harsher than God did which could indicate that she is beginning to wonder about God’s command.

The serpent then comes out with a blatant challenge to God—not just questioning the limits God has set but questioning why He set those limits.

*“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”*

The serpent is essentially saying, “God is wrong – you won’t die AND He is telling you this lie because He doesn’t want you to be like Him.” The serpent is getting them to doubt God. God is lying therefore He’s not good. God is being selfish therefore He’s not love. You can’t trust Him. You need to make your own decision.

Let’s just stop for a moment and see what has happened here. The day started out with Adam and Eve living in the *shalom* of the Garden of Eden. They are walking in close communion with God and through them, God is ruling and ordering their world according to his good plan. But in one conversation, everything changes. Suddenly, they are no longer looking to God as the perfect, Creator God, the source of all that is good and right. Instead, they are looking at God and asking why they should follow Him. You see – the question wasn’t “Should we eat that fruit?” The question was “Who has the right to be in charge?”

They make their choice and turn from God, to the Tree. And in that instant, before they have even taken their first bite, they have broken their relationship with God. They evaluate the Tree themselves and make their decision based on what they think it will do for them. They take the decision into their own hands.

What happens after that is simply the logical outcome of that decision. In the Hebrew we have eleven verbs that move forward without a break – “saw ... wanted ...took ... ate ... gave ... ate ... felt ... sewed ... cover ... heard ... hid.” (Genesis 3:6-8) It is like a ball gaining speed as it rolls down a hill. Nothing can stop it. In the process, we see them increasingly usurping God’s role in his creation. They decide for themselves what is good and what they need and they take it.

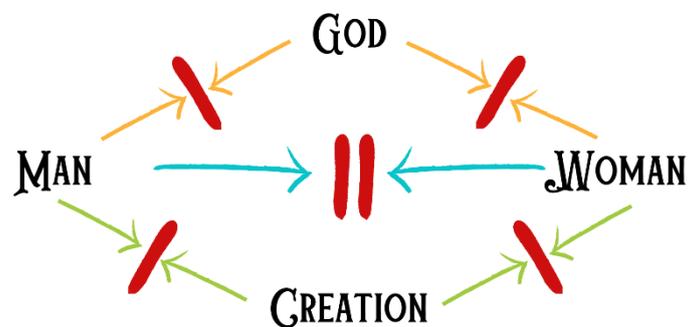
But why? Why did Adam and Eve turn away from their relationship with God in a way that was so sudden and complete? As we look at it, we feel that it is inconceivable, inexplicable and inexcusable. And yet—how often we do the exact same thing. We are given a choice to follow God’s way or our own way and even though we know it is wrong, we still choose our own way. That gift of choice which is part of what makes us what we are as human beings, means that the possibility of sin and evil is always present within us.

What we see happen now is a systematic destruction of *shalom*, the web of relationships God had created for them which brought them wholeness and flourishing.

The relationship with God is broken in the moment they choose to question him and doubt his goodness and love for them. When they hear Him walking in the garden, they run and hide.

Their relationship with each other is broken and they cover themselves in shame and blame each other for what happened. This is just the beginning of a struggle against each other, each seeking to rule the other.

And their relationship with the rest of creation is broken as well. When God created them in His image, He told them their role in His creation. They were to *“Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.”* (Genesis 1:28) Before this brought them joy. Now all those things would be hard work. Eve is told that childbirth – being fruitful - would be painful. And Adam is told that the business of governing and caring for the earth would become more difficult. The earth is cursed and broken because of the entrance of sin and as a result, God tells Adam, *“All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it.”* (Genesis 3:17)



Finally, they are cast out from the Garden of Eden and barred from re-entering it. This pictures their severance from the very life of God which brought *shalom*. The situation is very dark.

### **A Glimmer of Hope**

And yet! As we look at this chapter, we see that God doesn't walk away from them. He comes into the garden and calls to them. They are hiding from Him, but He is not hiding from them. He takes the initiative to seek them out. They were not cut off from God's life because He pulled away from them, but because they pulled away from Him.

This reminds me of the story of Zacchaeus we read this morning. Zacchaeus was curious about Jesus. He didn't necessarily come to Him to be healed, or to get answers to his questions, or to listen to his teaching. We are just told that he wanted to see Jesus. But when Jesus comes near, He calls out to Zacchaeus. Nobody else would have cared about a dishonest tax-collector, but Jesus did and He took the initiative to call him and come to his house. Like God in the Garden of Eden, Jesus *“came to seek and to save those who are lost”* (Luke 19:10). And when Zacchaeus responded to Jesus' call, He came back into contact with God's life and it changed him completely.

Secondly, although God did put them out of the Garden of Eden, he did not abandon them. Even though the work would be harder, humanity still had the job of ruling and caring for God's creation. A few chapters later we read that God gave special gifts to different people so that they would have the skills needed for a developing civilisation.

God also provided skins as coverings for them so that they could live together even though they were now aware of their own sinfulness. As well as meeting a very

immediate and practical need, some see in this a picture of the animal sacrifices which would come later.

Finally, in His pronouncements of the consequences of sin, we read this statement to the serpent: *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)* Who is the offspring of Eve who would crush the serpents head, although he would be wounded in the process? Jesus of course. Right from the very beginning, God is holding out hope that this brokenness and death is not forever. He already has a remedy in mind – a way to reconnect us to His life. Paul says, *“Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.”* (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Our God saves! Sin has brought death and separation. Sin has destroyed the *shalom* God created. However, this is not the end. It is just the beginning of God’s plan for our salvation which we will look at in more detail next week.