

# Promise Keeper

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31 ESV)*

*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33 ESV)*

## **He Shall Bruise Your Head**

**November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

**Genesis 3:15**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning!

This year for advent, we're going to adopt a slightly different approach. We're going to view the Christmas story with a different lens, and we are going to zoom all the way out. Beginning all the way back in the garden of Eden, we are going to identify promises that pointed forward to and found their fulfilment in the arrival of Jesus. To that end, we've titled this series "Promise Keeper". I want to help you to see the GREAT ANTICIPATION that the Old Testament lays out for the arrival of Jesus.

I have been struck over the years by the fact that a true appreciation of Christmas is only possible when we have an understanding of just how broken this world is. Some of you dread this time of the year, because it reminds you of loss, and death, and regret. But can I tell you something? What we celebrate at Christmas is that there is a glorious, bright new day that is going to break through this darkness. All that we have lost is going to be restored to us. In the famous Christmas carol, "O Holy Night" we sing the words:

Long lay the world in sin and error pining  
'Til he appeared and the soul felt it's worth  
A thrill of hope! The weary world rejoices  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lyrics by Placide Cappeau, music by Adolphe Charles Adam, *O Holy Night*.

With each passing year, those lyrics ring truer in my heart. The coming of Jesus into the world was like the arrival of rain after a century long draught. To “pine” is, “to suffer a mental and physical decline, especially because of a broken heart.”<sup>2</sup> I can’t think of a better description of life without Jesus. Apart from him, there is an inescapable and unanswerable weariness to life. But in him, praise God, there is a hope for the weary soul!

As we begin our series, I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Genesis. The first promise that we will be considering is found in Genesis 3:15, and it is a curious place to start because it is a promise that is made, not to Adam, or to Eve, but to the devil. As we read it, the sleighbells of Christmas likely won’t be ringing in your ears. And yet, this is an advent promise.

The promise that we will be considering this morning was made after Adam and Eve rebelled against God and plunged humanity into sin. We won’t understand the glory of the promise unless we do an overview to understand something of what we had, and what went wrong. So, that’s where we’re going to begin.

## **What We Had**

As odd as it sounds, you can’t understand Christmas if you don’t understand the Garden of Eden. What did life look like before we fell into sin? What did we have? For starters, before Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, we had:

### **1. Eternal life**

In Genesis 2:16-17, we read:

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,<sup>17</sup> 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 ESV)

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<sup>2</sup> “Pining” Oxford Dictionary.

Death was the consequence for Adam and Eve's rebellion. And that means that, before their rebellion, there was no death. All death is ultimately the result of sin.

Which means that death is an ABOMINATION. Anyone who has lost a loved one can attest to this. It's a universal truth. Deep down, we all feel a great despair – a great anger – when we are confronted with death. Everything inside of us screams, "It shouldn't be this way!" And that's exactly right! It should NOT be this way. Death is not your friend. In 1 Corinthians 15:26 we read:

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:26 ESV)

Do you see that? Death is your ENEMY. You are an eternal creature, and you have a longing for eternity in your heart. Before sin came into the world – before the serpent enticed Adam and Eve to rebel against God – we had eternal life. And that is what we were made for.

Second, we had:

## **2. Dominion**

Look with me at Genesis 1:26-28. There, we read:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:26-28 ESV)

Here, we learn that humanity was made in the image of God. In the ancient Near Eastern world, that language communicated authority. In that world, the king was seen as a human representation of his god, and he spoke and acted with the authority of his god. That is the idea that we are meant to see here. Adam and Eve were set apart from all the rest of creation. They and they alone were IMAGE BEARERS – exercising dominion over the world on God's behalf.

According to the Bible, we are not just another species of animal – we are walking, talking, representatives of the God of the universe! We were commanded to be fruitful and to multiply. We were commanded to fill the earth and subdue it. We were commanded to have dominion over the fish, and the birds, and every living thing.

We were made to work. We were made to cultivate. We were made to extend the garden of Eden to the farthest corners of the earth. Did you know that?

Again, this is a universal truth. You see it in the springtime as people rush into their gardens with joy to till the soil and chop back the brush and create structure for the flowers that will spring up. You see it in the workshop as a man spends his week of vacation carving and staining a table for his family. You see it in the kindergarten classroom as students stick their tongues out like Michael Jordan while they draw a family portrait with their favourite crayons.

Work was never supposed to be our enemy! We were made to cultivate, and to create, all to the glory of God in Whose image we were made! We had dominion and purpose!

Third, we had:

### **3. Intimacy**

Before the fall, Adam and Eve had a perfect relationship. Genesis 2:25 says:

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:25 ESV)

Now, this text is not about body image, though it might appear that way at first glance. No, the text is about intimacy. Adam knew everything about Eve, and Eve knew everything about Adam, and there was nothing that either of them needed to hide. They were fully known by one another, and they were unashamed. That is the kind of relationship that we were made for.

Immediately after they sinned, they experienced shame. They had to hide parts of themselves. In Genesis 3:7, we read:

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. (Genesis 3:7 ESV)

Because of sin, even our closest relationships are tainted by shame and distrust. We hide from each other. We conceal things from one another. We won't risk being fully known because our eyes have been opened and we see ourselves for what we truly are – flawed, broken, sin-scarred human beings.

But – and deep down we all sense this to be true – it is not supposed to be this way! We all want to be known! We all want to be safe! We all want to love and be loved! Because that is what we were made for. We had that. But sin distorted it. Finally, and most importantly, we had:

#### **4. God**

We had God! Adam and Eve lived in the undiluted presence of God! We are so far removed from this reality that it's hard to even engage our imaginations as to how incredible this must have been! We can imagine everlasting life, and dominion, and perfect relationships with one another, because we have experiential categories for all of that in our minds, but what would it look like to live in the undiluted presence of God? Can we even begin to imagine what that would be like?

Revelation 21 gives us a good place to start as we try to wrap our hearts and minds around this. John was given a vision of the new heaven and the new earth when we will be brought back into perfect fellowship with God, and John describes it this way:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Revelation 21:22-23 ESV)

I would suggest to you today that THIS is the deep need that most of us fail to recognize in our lives. You were made to live in relationship with God. That is why you exist. Everything else in your life is an overflow of your relationship with Him. You live because He created and sustains you. You create because He is the Creator and He made you in His image. You love because He is

love – but if you attempt to separate all of that from a relationship with Him then it is like unplugging a lamp from the outlet in the wall. It just won't work.

Before we go further, I want to draw your attention to the beauty and the truth of what God's word says that you need. Mohammed taught that everyone in paradise would have 72 virgin wives to gratify their sexual desires. Buddhism teaches that we should strive for Nirvana – a state of complete self-forgetfulness – essentially, a non-existence. And for the atheist, the purpose of life is what you make it, and there's nothing for you after death.

But God's word says, "Do you know what you were made for? Life. Creativity. Love. And a relationship with Me." One of the reasons why I am a Christian is because the promise of God is a promise that resonates with the deepest longings in my soul.

Adam and Eve had it all. They had eternal life, dominion, intimacy and they had GOD! So, what went wrong?

### **What Went Wrong?**

To answer this, let's jump back to the very first verse in the Bible. In Genesis 1, verse 1, the opening words of the Bible declare:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

This is where our story begins.

Are we living in a beautiful cosmic accident? Is our universe the by-product of chance and happenstance? That is the worldview that shapes our culture – it's the water we're swimming in – but the Bible challenges our preconceptions in the very first verse.

Everything that we know and love in the world was created by God. The galaxies, the animals, the sunset, the ocean, you, me – EVERYTHING was made by Him.

And because God is the Creator, He makes the rules. And, by the way, that is a GOOD thing! His rules are GOOD! They lead to LIFE! He is perfectly wise, and just, and loving, and His rules are an outflow of His perfection. We are called to obey God because we are His creatures. We live in His house. We can't even draw a single breath apart from His sustaining power.

And yet, even though we are creatures – even though God deserves our trust and our obedience – we thumb our noses at Him and reject His wisdom and His commands. We learned this from our father, Adam. In Genesis 3, we read about the first rebellion, and the moment when everything changed. Look there with me:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”<sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,<sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.<sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:1-6 ESV)

I want you to notice how our enemy works. He asks Eve, “Did God *actually* say...” and his question drips with incredulity and disgust. He goes on to undermine God’s integrity: “You will *not* surely die.” *God won’t actually follow through with those consequences! This isn’t really a big deal.* And then, he casts doubt on God’s motives: “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” *He’s withholding from you! True happiness – true fulfillment – is found OUTSIDE of the boundaries that God has put in place.* As one author rightly notes:

The tempter targets the word of God.<sup>3</sup>

And this tactic is effective! It is today, and it was in the Garden of Eden. Eve took and ate, and then she shared it with Adam. In that moment, Adam and Eve rejected God’s word and they embraced the lie of the evil one. They distrusted God, even though He had been nothing but

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<sup>3</sup> Graham A. Cole, *Against The Darkness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 86.

trustworthy. They disobeyed God, even though He had blessed them with overwhelming generosity. And at the root of their rebellion was a desire to dethrone God and to be gods unto themselves.

This act of rebellion – this cosmic tyranny – led to the fall. When we brought sin into the world, we came under a curse.

We lost eternal life. When we inserted sin and rebellion into God’s good creation we paved the way for murder, disease and death.

We lost dominion. The work that was meant to be life giving became backbreaking and gruelling.

We lost intimacy. We hide from one another and live lives that are shaped by shame and deceit.

We lost God. Adam and Eve could no longer enjoy His undiluted presence. They hid from Him, and then they were cast out of the garden with a flaming sword barring their re-entrance.

This is the story of our rebellion and our fall. Merry Christmas!

This sermon almost certainly feels out of place in an advent series, but in the center of humanity’s darkest day – we find a promise of hope – a promise of advent!

### **The Promise**

Look with me now to the first promise of advent in the Bible. It’s found in Genesis 3:15. Before God announced the curses that Adam and Eve would experience as a result of the fall, He addressed the serpent and issued this promise:

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

Now, I’m not exaggerating when I tell you that the story of the Bible – and the story of your life – cannot be understood apart from what we read in this verse.



We learn here that there is a battle that is being waged all around us. In fact, the battle is even being waged *inside* of us. It is a battle between good and evil. The devil is at war with humanity.

By the way, I want to make sure you don't miss what I just said. The devil is at war with *humanity*. He's not at war with God. The devil is a creature. He is no threat to God, and he knows that. He's at war with the woman and her offspring – he is at war with us!

That is a frightening reality! We see it repeated all across the New Testament. But lest we be tempted to slip into despair I want to make sure that you see that God has already revealed to us how this battle will end. He promises the serpent – he promises our enemy – that a woman will give birth to a child, and though he will be struck on the heel, he will deliver a blow to the enemy's head! This promise is what bible scholars refer to as the protoevangelium – the first glimpse of the gospel in the Bible.

This is the promise of a coming champion – a coming liberator – who will restore to us everything that we lost at the fall. This is meant to shape how we read the Old Testament. It tells us what we are to be looking for. With each passing chapter – with each generation – we are asking the question, “Is this the child that will crush the serpent's head?”

Adam and Eve give birth to a boy named Able, and he showed signs of promise! I'm no mind reader, but they **MUST** have believed that he would be the one to restore them to the garden. But then Able was struck down in a fit of jealousy by his brother Cain, and Adam and Eve saw that our sin problem is even larger than they understood. There really is a war that is being waged.

Later, we meet Noah – a righteous man – who God delivers through the waters of the flood! Could this be the one?! A new Adam, stepping forth onto a new, cleansed world?! And yet, with wonder and despair, we watch as he climbs out of the ark and gets so drunk that he blacks out.

Later, we meet Abraham, and he is a man of faith! Yet, he is also a liar, and a coward, and he often disbelieves God's promises and takes matters into his own hands.

Later, we meet Jacob – another liar. Moses – a murderer. David – o surely this must be the one! A man after God’s own heart! A giant slayer! A man of prayer! But we read on and come to find that he is a sinner just like all the rest. He’s a wife stealer, a power exploiter, and a murderer.

By the end of the Old Testament, we’re left with the despairing question: “Where is the hero that You promised, God?! Where is the child who you said would be born – the boy who would crush the serpent’s head?”

It is that despair – that longing – that prepares us to wonder and worship at the announcement we find in Matthew 1:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, **for he will save his people from their sins.**” (Matthew 1:18-21 ESV)

This. Is. Him!

The wait is over! Our God is a promise keeper! The child who would save the world was born 2,000 years ago in a little town called Bethlehem. The saviour who will reverse the curse and set us free from the tyranny of sin and death has finally come! Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till he appeared.

Maybe there’s someone here today who is still reeling from the brokenness of this world. You feel it in your bones – that something is wrong with the world. Worse – something is wrong with you. As you heard about life, and dominion, and intimacy, and a relationship with the God who made you, something was stirring in your heart that has never stirred before.

I want you to listen closely, because I am about to tell you about Jesus – the Saviour who came to bring you back to life.

Jesus defeated our enemy in the most unexpected way. In his sinless perfection, he accepted in his body the curse for our sin. My sin. Your sin. All the rebellion and evil that should FOREVER separate us from our holy God, Jesus assumed in his own flesh. Then, bearing our sin, he went to the cross on our behalf. The devil thought that he had won. As the nails were driven into his hands and feet – as Jesus' cried out "It is finished!" the enemy thought that he had dealt the final blow.

But it was only a strike at the heel.

When Jesus died on that cross, he fulfilled the just penalty for sin. In doing so, he made a way for us to be set free from the curse, and to come back home to God. Jesus said:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.  
(John 14:6b ESV)

Jesus is the only way home. If you will repent of your sin and place your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you will be engrafted into a new family.

It is a family that inherits the blessing rather than the curse.

It is a family that will experience resurrection from the dead.

It is a family that will enjoy eternal life, and dominion, and intimacy, and GOD – a family that will live in a new Eden with the true and better Adam forever.

Will you be there with him?

Let's pray together.