The Story of Christmas ~ Pt. 1

"The Story Begins with a Promise"

(12/6/15)

As you are all painfully aware of we have officially entered into the Christmas season.

And in honor of Christmas and all that it means to us as Christians I'd like to do something I've never done before in all my years of ministry.

I'd like to take this Sunday, the next two Sundays and then finishing on Christmas Day—I'd like to set aside these four services to focus on the 'Story of Christmas'.

I remember years ago when my oldest son Phil was only about 5 or 6 years old, he came to me a couple of weeks before Christmas and asked me to read him the Christmas story from the Bible.

My initial reaction was to turn to the Gospel of Luke and read to him the first part of chapter two when the Lord spoke to my heart and reminded me that that really wasn't where the Christmas story began—in many ways that was the culmination of the story of Christmas.

You see the Christmas story didn't begin in Bethlehem or in a manger or even with the angel announcing to Mary that she had been chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah—

The Christmas story actually began four thousand years earlier in a Garden—the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17 (NKJV)
[8] The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. [9] And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life *was* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil…[15] Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. [16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; [17] 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 3:1a (NKJV)
[1] Now the <u>serpent</u> was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made…

In Genesis 3 the serpent isn't specifically identified as Satan—however when we look at other Scriptures they clearly point out that the serpent here is none other than Satan himself—

In Ezekiel 28:13-19 God tells us that Satan was in Eden, the Garden of God.

In Revelation 12 and 20 we see a dragon that is then identified as *"that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan".*

The word **'cunning'** is a Hebrew word that means *'intelligent, shrewd'.*

This of course was not like the serpent we think of today.

What this creature looked like before the fall, how it got around, how beautiful it was we don't know.

Did all the animals in the Garden talk or was it only this one?

I personally don't think that all the animals in the Garden talked but that Eve was in such a state of innocence that when Satan spoke through this creature she didn't get startled or become suspicious—as perhaps if a two year old's pet dog or cat spoke…

Where did Satan come from?

The Bible says that God created him and gave him the name Lucifer which means *'shinning one'.*

In Ezekiel 28:14 God tells us that at one time Lucifer was the *"anointed cherub that covers"* (Explain)

In Isaiah 14 God tells us that Lucifer wasn't content to be second in rank to the Almighty—he wanted to be the Most High God and so he led a rebellion in heaven in an attempt to overthrow God.

Revelation 12 tells us that he was able to convince a third of the angels in heaven to follow him in his revolt—they failed of course and became *fallen* angels.

At that time Lucifer became Satan (adversary) and the devil (accuser/slanderer).

Now you need to understand that even after the fall Lucifer still maintained his beauty as a shining one.

In fact he uses that beauty to his advantage as a deceiver—in 2Corinthians 11:14 Paul tells us that Satan transforms himself into an "angel of light" to deceive.

The word 'angel' simply means *messenger*.

There have been many supernatural messengers over the centuries that have come to people giving them spiritual 'truth'.

These would include the angel Moroni, and many other 'ascended masters', 'alien visitors' etc. that have been Satan or sent by Satan with a message of "truth", a "gospel" of sorts—these have been nothing more than lies sent from the devil and his demons.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4 (NLT)
3 But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent. 4 You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.

In a sense we are all victims of Milton's depiction of Satan as an ugly, hideous creature when in fact he is described in Scripture as a creature that was created by God *"perfect in wisdom and beauty"—*

So much so that when we see him for the first time Isaiah tells us we are going to say, *"Is this the one who caused all the trouble?..."*

So sometime before Genesis chapter 3 Lucifer sinned in heaven and fell—Jesus said, in Luke 10:18—*"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven".*

Now when Lucifer fell his authority in heaven was terminated—but he continues to maintain authority as leader of an army of fallen angelic beings <u>that are still bent on overthrowing God</u>.

Satan knew he couldn't do anything to hurt God directly so he decided to do the next best thing—hurt those that God loved and made in His own image for the purpose of loving fellowship.

Genesis 3 is all about Satan exporting his rebellion from heaven to the earth where he set his sights on corrupting mankind and tearing them from God through sin.

But that wasn't his only plan—he wanted to take from Adam and Eve, through deception, the world God had given to them, so that Satan could become the world's new owner and man's new master.

Genesis 3:1 (NKJV)
[1] Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You ["you' is plural down through v.5] **shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"**

In John's gospel chapter 8 Jesus referred to Satan as *"the father of lies, who was a liar from the beginning".*

This was, no doubt, a reference to Genesis 3 when Satan, as the father of lies offered up the first lie he ever fed the human race (Adam and Eve).

The very first lie of the devil was to tell Eve that God didn't tell her the truth.

Notice he doesn't come right out and call God a liar—Satan is much too subtle for that.

First he tries to get Eve to doubt what God said**—"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (v.1)**

Some of the newer translations put it this way, **"Did God really say…"**

Here we have the first question in the Bible posing the first dilemma in human history—there were no dilemmas before this one.

The question is carefully crafted by Satan to start Eve down the path of doubting God's Word.

He knows that doubting the Word of God will inevitably lead to rejecting the will of God and then doing whatever seems right in her own eyes.

One author put it—

"And for the first time the most deadly spiritual force was covertly smuggled into the world—what was it? The assumption that what God has said is subject to human judgment."

The attack centered on the one prohibition that God had placed on Adam and Eve—that one tree He told them they couldn't eat from—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

His point seems to be to try to convince Eve that God is unnecessarily restrictive and narrow—*"God wants to limit your freedom and rob you of the fulfillment you deserve."*

Not only did that undermine the truth of God, it was a frontal assault on the character of God.

How can God be all that loving and good if He withholds from us things that are beneficial—and if so how can we really trust Him to control our lives?

Satan tries to get Eve to think that he cares more about her welfare than God does—

God, he implies, is trying to keep from her something that is good while he, the devil, wants her to have the full freedom to do what she wants and experience what she wants.

Now at this point Eve isn't ready to take the bait completely so she tries in a weak way to defend God—

Genesis 3:2-3 (NKJV)
[2] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;
[3] "but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

Notice she tries to defend God's Word by adding something to it**—"…nor shall you touch it…"**

God has severely warned us about adding to or subtraction from His Word. (Rev.22:18-19)

Why did Eve feel the need to add something to what God had said?

It could be at this point that Eve *is* starting to feel that God was being overly restrictive and so she adds **"…we can't eat from it <u>or touch it</u> lest we die."** (Explain)

At this point Satan knows he's got her right where he wants her so he drops the subtleness and attacks God directly—

Genesis 3:4-5 (NKJV)
[4] Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

First Satan tells her—*"You can't trust God's Word, He doesn't have your best interest in mind—His way isn't the path of true fulfillment";* **Secondly** he tells her—*"You won't surely die."*

In other words, *"You can do whatever you think is right, even if it goes against what God has said and there won't be any consequences for it—<u>no judgment</u>!"*

This is a message Satan is preaching to our world through all kinds of outlets like TV, the music industry, the movies coming out of Hollywood and even through advertising—

- *"No Boundaries!"*—Ford Motor Company.

- *"No Rules!"*—Outback Steakhouse.

- Or as another company admonished—*"Live outside the lines!"*

In other words the big lie Satan wants people to buy into is that they can live their lives without God's rules, His laws and there won't be a day of reckoning coming—no consequences, no judgment!

And why is this a message that so resonates with people?—because the prevailing attitude in our culture is—

"No one knows what will make me happy more than me—and my personal happiness is what life is all about. And so I don't want anyone, including God, telling me how to live my life—I want the freedom to make my choices and do whatever feels right and makes me happy."

Now to live that way a person has got to either do away with God Himself (atheist movement) or at very least twist what He has said so that they can do whatever they think is right while making themselves feel they're living a good life—('truth is not absolute it's relative').

Genesis 3:6 (NKJV)
[6] So 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 with her, and he ate.

So Eve, with the serpent's help, became the first person on earth to doubt and deny the validity and authority of God's Word opting instead to do what seemed right <u>in her own eyes</u>.

And in so doing she became a judge over God's Word instead of allowing the Word of God to be the judge and final authority over her life and conduct.

This is where spiritual warfare began on the earth—in the Garden in Genesis 3—and notice it started when mankind opened the door to it through rebellion against the Word of God.

And when man fell Satan took over and became the 'god of this world' and the 'prince of the power of the air", the commander and chief of an evil army which is using the earth as a base of operations from which to overthrow God, His people and His kingdom.

Genesis 3:14-15 (NKJV)
14 So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

Verse 15 is known as the *protevangelium*, meaning "The First Gospel"—or in other words the first place in Scripture where the gospel appears.

The offspring ("seed") of the serpent and of the woman represent Satan's family and God's family.

1 John 3:10-12 (NKJV)
10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12 not as Cain *who* was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

The family of God would ultimately be born from a single 'Seed'—Jesus Christ.

The woman's **Seed** would crush the Devil's **head**, a mortal wound spelling absolute defeat—but first Satan would bruise the Messiah's heel.

This is a reference to the suffering and physical death that Jesus would endure on the cross but which would not result in His ultimate defeat—three days later He would emerge from the tomb victorious as He conquered over sin, Satan and death itself.

The fact that He is called the *woman's* **Seed** is a reference to His <u>virgin birth</u>.

We'll have more to say about this next week as we continue "The Story of Christmas" series.

The title of today's message is "The Story Begins with a Promise".

There are many that would be puzzled to hear me say that the Christmas story actually begins in Genesis 3—*"why do you believe that"* they would no doubt ask me.

I believe that because that's where the first sin happened, that's where man fell and that's the story of redemption begins—you see the story of Christmas is really the story of redemption.

The story of redemption begins with <u>a promise</u>—a promise from God that someday He would send a Redeemer to save us from our sin and give us eternal life.

Unless we see the story of Christmas against the backdrop of the Fall and the fact that we were doomed to spend eternity apart from God in hell—

Unless you understand the hopelessness of our predicament you will never appreciate the announcement of the angel,*"Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord!"*

The church for the past 30 years has been fed a steady diet of self-esteem teaching and man-centered theology which has all served to make many in the Church think God exists to make them happy and that they're a "good person" and therefore deserve heaven.

1 Timothy 1:15 (NLT)
15 This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all.

Luke 7:47 (NKJV)
47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, *which are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little."

Implying that the more conscious we are of our unworthiness the more we will love Him for His grace and forgiveness He has bestowed on unworthy sinners such as us.

Our love and appreciation for God is directly proportionate to how little or how much we see ourselves as sinners saved by grace.