

Christmas 2023

“The Story of Christmas-Part 1”

The Story Begins With A Promise

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Find this weeks’ sermon audio and video message [HERE](#).

As you are all painfully aware—we have officially entered into the Christmas season. In honor of Christmas and all that it means to us as Christians—I’d like to do something a little different this year. I’d like to start today and then over the next 3 Sundays (finishing on Christmas Eve)—I’d like to do a 4-part series which I’m calling, **“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 him the first 14 verses of chapter 2 (you know the verses Linus made famous in the classic “A Charlie Brown Christmas”).

REFLECTION: Share one of your favorite Christmas stories and how you have celebrated Christmas in your home:

However, the Lord spoke to my heart and reminded me that that really wasn’t where the Christmas story *began*—in fact, 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 begins 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 serpent 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 **God tells us that Satan was in Eden**, the Garden of God.
- In Revelation Chapters 12 and 20 we see a dragon that is 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 the serpent the only one?**

I personally don't believe that all the animals in the Garden talked.

I believe that Satan spoke through this creature (possibly Eve's pet) to tempt Eve, but that she was in such a state of *innocence* that when Satan spoke through the serpent, she didn't get startled or become suspicious (kind of like if a two-year old's pet dog or cat spoke to them).

➤ *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.**"
- In Isaiah 14 God tells us that **Lucifer wasn't content to be second in rank to the Almighty**—he wanted to be like 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.**

REFLECTION: What are some of the names, titles and understandings you have of Satan?

In 2 Corinthians 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 (‘beings of light’) over the centuries that have come to people giving them supposed spiritual ‘truth’.

These would include the angel Moroni, and many other ‘ascended white masters’, ‘extra-terrestrial visitors’ etc. that have been Satan or sent by Satan with a message of “truth” (the “cosmic gospel”)—these have been nothing more than lies sent from the devil and his demons designed to pervert God’s truth:

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.” (Ezekiel 28:12).**

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?!*” **utterly shocked that such evil could have come from a being so beautiful as Lucifer!**

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 angels and demonic beings that are still bent on overthrowing God.

Satan knew he couldn’t do anything to hurt God directly, so he decided to do the next best thing—hurt those that God loves, those made in His 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, tearing them from God through sin—and destroying them in hell forever.

To accomplish his objective, **he needed to get Adam and Eve to disobey God** and thus turn the world God had given to them over to him (Satan) so that he 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?’”

REFLECTION: Why was it important for Satan to have Adam & Eve disobey God?

In John's Gospel Chapter 8:44 Jesus referred to **Satan as—"the father of lies, who was a murderer and 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 (which at that time consisted of only 2 people, 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'?" (verse 1)

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

The Hebrew in this verse could be translated—"So God has said, has He?"

One author put it well—

"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. And so, for the first time in human history 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."

Satan's 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 plan seems to be (in his effort to get her to disobey God), to convince Eve that God is unnecessarily restrictive by implying to her that—**"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 direct frontal assault on the character of God as well.

How can God be all-loving and good if He withholds from us things that are beneficial—and if He does so, how can we really trust that He has our best interests at heart enough to give Him control of 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.

REFLECTION: What is the strategy Satan uses to have man turn away from God?

Now at this point Eve isn't ready to 'take the bait' completely—so she tries in a weak, half-hearted 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—"You shall not eat from the tree...nor shall you touch it lest you die."

God has severely warned us against adding to or subtracting from His Word. (Revelation 22:18-19)

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

It could be that at this point Eve *is* starting to 'weaken' in her faith in God's character and therefore she adds 'weight' to His word by adding another prohibition in an attempt to not only defend God but to convince herself that He isn't being unreasonable or unnecessarily restrictive.

Now, at this point Satan knows he's got her right where he wants her—so he drops the subtlety 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 at heart—His way isn't the path of true fulfillment."

Secondly he tells her—"You won't surely die."

In other words, "Eve, 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—no judgment!"

REFLECTION: Have you ever been to the point where you did not trust God's Word?

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 the advertising of major corporations:

- **“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,
without His laws and there won’t be a day of reckoning coming
no consequences, no judgment so no problem!**

➤ **Why is this a message that so resonates with people?**

Because it taps into the **rebellion in the heart of man**—rebellion that goes back to the Garden of Eden.

It’s 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 (hence the neo-atheist movement) or at very least make *truth* into something that is *relative* and not absolute (*“truth is whatever I say it is.”*)

REFLECTION: Think of other advertisements, slogans, activities etc. that may have tempted you or others to doubt God’s Word:

Genesis 3:6 (NKJV)

⁶So 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 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 in her own eyes—based on what her physical senses told her was truth, instead of what God’s word told her was truth.

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!

Notice it started when mankind opened the door to it through **rebellion against the Word of God**. So, 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.

➤ *"Whoa, pastor, I thought this was supposed to be a Christmas message! You're starting to bring me down!"*

Hang in there—we're getting to that!

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** (proh dee van JELL ee um) meaning **"The First Gospel"**—or in other words the first place in Scripture where the gospel appears.

REFLECTION: How do you define spiritual warfare? How do you combat spiritual warfare?

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

1 John 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 3:10 (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...

The family of God would ultimately be born from a single 'Seed'—Messiah Jesus!

God promised Eve that her 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 death and defeat!

Because, as we know,
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 '*Seed of the woman*' is a reference to His birth—that this coming Redeemer, Savior and Messiah would have a miraculous birth—a virgin birth!

As we all know—the story of Christmas
is the story of Jesus' First Coming to the earth.

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

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 where the story of *redemption* begins.

You see the story of Christmas—is really the story of *redemption*! The story of redemption begins with a promise—a promise from God that someday He would send a Redeemer to save us from our sins and give us eternal life.

REFLECTION: What does it mean to be redeemed by God?

Unless we see the story of Christmas against the backdrop of the Fall and the fact that we were utterly lost and 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 50 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 "good people" who deserve heaven.

The gospel message isn't that Jesus came into the world to save 'good' people who deserved heaven—it's that Jesus came into the world to save sinners who deserved to go to hell—

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

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

Merry Christmas!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— *you can experience the richest Christmas of your life!*

Please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).