

Sa Good. Well, good morning. I see a couple of faces in this room right now. We had Vanya up here leading worship. But I see some other faces I don't see often, but I'm always glad to see them when they're here.

If you're visiting with family and friends, you're here just for a couple of days. Just. You don't have to raise your hand at all. We're just glad to see you here. We're just glad you're here.

You don't need to stand up. We don't need to look at you. We're just glad you're here. Hey. One of my favorite family traditions growing up.

Maybe you have some as well. But one of my favorites is reading this little story. The story was called the Best Christmas Pageant Ever. Has anyone read that book? I got a hand back there.

We got a few hands back there. If you've not read this story, you need to read it. It's a short one. You can read with your family. Beautiful little story tells the.

It tells about a church that has a long and glorious history of this special Christmas pageant that they do. And people come from all over to see this. Well, what happens is one year the worst kids in town decide to be part of this show up. And as the church sort of wrestles with how to incorporate the Herdmans, this horrible little family, they learn what Christmas is really about. Now, if you are not a reader, there's actually a movie out right now.

I saw it a couple of weeks ago. It is fantastic. Put out by the same people that did the Chosen. So if you're familiar with the Chosen, I encourage you to go see this movie. It is just a sweet, sweet little memory and puts you in mind of all those horrible little Christmas pageants you had to be part of as a kid.

So now, Christmas pageants did not originate with the American church. They've been going on for a long, long, long time. Its roots go clear back to the Middle Ages. The medieval church used plays and Dr. To teach scripture and teach the accounts of the Bible to people who couldn't read on their own.

And one of the plays that they did on Christmas Eve was called A Paradise Play. Now, the Paradise Play depicted the story of the creation of Adam and Eve and their sin and their banishment from the garden, the Paradise Garden. And it ended with the promise of the victorious redeemer who would come and overcome evil and set the world right again. And so over the month of December, we're going to look at how that promise that that that closed out. The paradise play plays out through the story of God's word.

And so you saw just in the bumper, a few of the names. We're going to be looking at Anna and Mary and Elizabeth, of course, next week, Alan's going to be talking about Bathsheba. Did you know she was part of the Christmas story? Well, she certainly is. But today we're going to start, as Maria von Trapp said, we're going to start at the very best place to start, which is the beginning, in the beginning.

So if you got your Bibles, turn to the book of Genesis and we're going to land right there. I'll pray and you can flip pages. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this season of the church year where we get to remember and celebrate your coming, the gift of God which brings eternal life, Jesus Christ. So we are thankful, Jesus, for you coming and we're thankful for this time here in this room, surrounded by people we love and we sometimes don't get to see as much as we would like to, to celebrate together the gift that we have in you, eternal life. And we pray and give thanks in Jesus name.

Amen. Well, if you're there, good job. Good job. If you're there in Genesis, you are in what many people call Act One. So they talk about the Bible as being the story of God's work among humanity.

And it's in two acts, the Old Testament, Act 1, the New Testament, Act 2. And here's the deal. If you come in on Act 2, sometimes it doesn't make a lot of sense. You have to be very aware of what happened in Act 1. You don't start a series on the third season.

You start a series on the first season, don't you? So here's. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to start in Act 1 because in Act 2, we will have this scripture in First John 3, 8, the reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the evil, the evil one, over the works of the devil. So if you don't know act one, that doesn't make a lot of sense.

You're left with the question, well, who is the devil? Or what is the devil? And what did he do that was so bad that it must be destroyed? So the answers to Act 2 are in Act 1. So we're in Act 1, Act 1, Scene 1 in this story of God's redemption of humanity.

Act 1, Scene 1 begins in Genesis 1, the very first chapter of the book. And it begins with an empty stage, completely dark. In fact, picture yourself in a. In a theater, filled. You and the hosts of heaven, the angels of heaven, who are observing all of what's going to go on.

Completely dark, blacked out, nothing. All you hear is a little hum. Maybe this sounds like the orchestra warming up a little bit. The scriptures say that the spirit of God hovered over the darkness. So there's something going on even in the darkness.

But it's a blackened stage. And suddenly there's a spotlight. The

spotlight shines down on this stage. And as you watch, things begin to happen. Soil begins to appear, water starts to flow, and you hear the sound of babbling brooks and the roar of waterfalls.

And then you start to see life coming out of that soil. You see trees and plants, and then you see birds and animals begin to appear. And then almost from the earth itself, something raises up and takes on form. And you realize, oh, that is a man. We'll know him as Adam.

Now, that's just Act 1, Scene 1, Act 2. This man walks around the garden, gets familiar with it. The Creator, the one who's making all of this happens, introduces him to the garden and everything in it, the delights that there, it's heaven on earth. And Adam is told, it's all yours to work and enjoy. Make it better.

Make it your own. Make this place yours. With one caveat. We all know what the caveat is. In Genesis 2, verse 16, the Lord God commands the man, you're free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil.

For when you eat it, when you eat from it, you will certainly die. Now, this tree is going to be important. If you're not familiar with this story, hold onto that tree. We're going to come back to it in just a little bit. In the meantime.

Well, look over there from stage left comes this beautiful character. It's a woman. Adam will call her Eve, but not yet. But for sake of clarity, we're just going to call her Eve. She is perfect.

God made her for Adam. It's the perfect complement to him made from him. So it's a perfect, perfect partner for Adam. He thinks she's amazing, but God didn't make her just for Adam. He made her for the garden as well.

Because the job is too big for one man. God says it's not good for Adam to try to do all this alone. He needs help. And so God creates a helper for him to manage and maintain and make this place absolutely amazing. Oh, she's not just decorative.

She's there to work, too. So that's act one, scene two. Now let's go to act one, scene three. This is Genesis, chapter three. And this is where we're going to spend the bulk of our time, because here's where the story gets interesting.

We laid the framework. The play is established, we know most of the main characters. And now we go to chapter three, and we are introduced to new character. Everything's perfect, isn't it? Can you see it?

It's like, oh, I want that life. And then in Act 1, Scene 3, we meet the serpent. Now, spoiler alert, this serpent, we'll figure out who he

really is in just a little bit. And on Christmas Eve, we're gonna talk a little bit more about that serpent. He gets his own sort of showcase moment on Christmas Eve.

So come back for Christmas Eve. If you're. If you're not planning to change your plans, be here soon. This serpent will be amassed. We'll see who it is.

And it's actually Satan. You don't know that just yet, but you will. And in Genesis chapter three, we learn a little bit about this new character. Now, the serpent, it says, was craftier than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, the serpent said to the woman, did God really say that you must not eat from any tree of the garden?

This serpent seems to have fascinated Eve. One, he talks. I don't know any serpent that does that. And if Adam is like any other guy in this room, prolonged conversations are going to be hard for him. And so the snake talks to Eve, and the serpent talks to Eve.

And he's like, look, I've got a. I've got a friend, someone who'll talk to me. Eve has made friends with Satan, but Satan is no friend of Eve, because his whole objective is to undo and destroy everything good in Eve's life. This beautiful place that God's put her in, he wants to deface it. This perfect relationship between Eve and Adam, he wants it corrupted.

This beautiful fellowship between Eve and her creator, God. Satan wants it destroyed. And he begins his plan of destruction with this simple question, Eve. Now, did God. Correct me if I'm wrong, Eve, but did God really say that you can't eat of any of the trees of the garden?

Now, that's a ridiculous question, because he knows as well as we do that that's not what God said. And so the woman, in attempt to just be friendly, says, well, we may eat from the fruit of the trees in the garden. But God did say, you must not eat fruit from the tree that's in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it or you will die. Now, Eve adds that little bit. Did you notice that she added a little bit there about not touching it?

God didn't say that. But I think she said it because she thought maybe it would help to just help her resist temptation just a little bit more. I do this when I say, okay, no magic morning for a month. In fact, to not go to magic morning, I'm just not even going to Drive on 16th Street. You been there.

Anyone made stupid things like that? Yeah, well, within a day and a half of living in Bedford, you realize that avoiding 16th street is pretty inconvenient. And so then you're on 16th street and going,

well, I've already blown the first thing I said I was going to do. And it's a very short step between driving on 16th street and walking out of magistrate morning with two dozen donuts. And you're like, what happened here?

Well, this is what Eve says. We can't even touch it. We can't even touch it. I think this is why God says, don't add or subtract anything from my word. Because here's the deal.

You don't strengthen God's law by adding to it. You actually end up weakening it. So don't add to God's. What God says is what God says. Don't add to it.

Don't take away from it. Oh, the serpent senses this sort of weakening point because he knows how we are. He says, oh, oh, oh. So the serpent sees the moment he strikes, and he says, well, Eve, now hold on. I can tell you categorically that you will not surely die.

Instead, he says in verse four, your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God, and you'll know good and evil. Now, the serpent couldn't care less about Eve. He couldn't care less about whether he ate that fruit or not. What he wants is to. Is to make Eve distrust God's word.

Well, no, wait, did. Because evil Eve's already fudged a little bit on God's word, didn't he? Didn't she? And so now it's like I can, I guess, sympathize with Eve. I think you can, too, because we've all stood in front of trees that God said no.

And we go, well, I mean, what's the big deal? It's just. It's just coffee with an old friend. It's Just moving some numbers around. It'll get sorted out later.

We'll make it work. It's just one time and no one's going to get hurt. And so we justify our disobedience like Eve is going to do right now. Look at verse six. The woman looks at the fruit of the tree and she says, I'm sure it's really good for food.

It certainly looks like it would be delicious. And there is some wisdom in that fruit in some way, shape or form. And so what does she do? She takes some and she eats it. Oh no.

Oh no. What's going to happen when Adam finds out what she's done?

She takes a bite of it. She goes, ooh, this is good. Try this. Because he's standing right there. He's right there.

He should have been out brush hogging. He should have been out planting flowers or weeding the flowers. He had a job to do. He should have been at work, Adam. But instead, no, there he is.

Adam goes, mmm, oh, okay.

And what happens? The eyes of both of them are opened and they realize they're naked. And so they sew fig leaves together and make coverings for themselves. The serpent said their eyes would be opened. He was right.

He told the truth. They were opened. But instead of knowing everything, they realized suddenly they've lost everything. They've lost it all. The lie of the devil is always the same.

You can push against God's law and it'll be all right. It'll be fine. But it never is fine. And now they're naked and they're ashamed. And what do us, what do we do when we find ourselves embarrassed and exposed?

We try to fix it. We try to fix it. We just try to avoid it. And so Eve says, I can fix it. I can fix it.

I'm gonna sew some leaves together and fix us something real nice. So when we go to church tonight and meet up with God, we'll look good and no one will know. He'll not know. He always knows. He's gonna know.

Here's the next scene. The man and his wife hear the sound of the Lord as he's walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And I think they look down at their leaves and they go, this didn't quite turn out like we thought it was going to. Does this make me look fat or just sinful? And so they go hide in the trees.

But the Lord calls to the man, adam, Adam, where are you? When I had a dog coming home, I knew that King was going to Meet me right at the door. Oh, he's the only person in my life who's ever always been excited to see me. So excited to see me. Except when he wasn't and when I would open the door and the dog wasn't there and I'd be like, king nothing.

And I'm walking through the house knowing I'm going to find something beside the dog. Anyone know what I'm talking about? Yeah. Yeah. So Adam.

God's like, adam, Adam, where are you? Crickets. Adam. Adam. Finally, Adam's like, yeah, I heard you in the garden.

And I didn't answer right away because I was naked. So, yeah, so I just. I hid over there. And God says, adam, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?

I love it. As a parent, have you ever played dumb? God knows exactly what Adam and Eve have done. Nothing's escaped his attention. Notice

he still comes to meet with them.

They've disobeyed him, but he still comes to meet with them. He goes, adam, what? What's. Explain to me what. What's.

What happened here? Before Eve can jump in, Adam jumps in quick. He goes, well, the woman that you put here, God. So the term gaslighting is a new one, but Adam's got it down. He knows what he's doing here.

It says, okay, well, Lord, really, it's your fault. You put her here. And then she gave me some fruit and I ate it, but it was really your fault.

God looks at Adam, then he looks at Eve in their little leaf clothes, and they look pretty pathetic because, let's be honest, no one looks good in leaves. No one does. I don't encourage that. And Eve doesn't really know how to sow yet. So it's.

Now we laugh. But all the stuff that we do to make our own sinful, shameful lives that we do to make us look better can be just as pathetic as trying to weave together some fig leaves. We do that, or we just run and we try to hide. We can try to cover, we can try to hide, but in the end, God knows. And God looks at Adam and Eve and here's the deal.

He loves them so much. I'll tell you why I know in just a bit. But Eve doesn't know this because, see, she's got this doubt planted in her about God. The serpent planted it there. Does God really is God?

Really? Does he? He's like, I don't know who this God is just yet. So when God turns to her. And here's how the scripture says it.

The Lord says to the woman, what is this that you've done? What has happened here? In other words, tell me, Eve, what happened? Have you ever asked that question of your kids? Just tell me what happened.

And if you're like me, this is an invitation for you to trust me. Because here's the deal. You may have done bad, but if you. If you address it quickly, if you tell me quickly, we can perhaps fix it. We can help it make.

Make it be not so bad. I'm an adult. I have power that you don't have. And God says, I have power that you don't have. Tell me what has happened here.

Let's see if we can fix it. But Eve, Eve doesn't yet trust this redeeming God who can make all things work together for good. To those that love and trust him. She doesn't know this yet. And so Eve, embarrassed and ashamed because this is not who she wanted to be.

This is not who God created her to be. She's scared of the consequences because she knows there will be consequences. What Eve does is she turns somewhat defiant. She goes, well, it's not my fault. She says, the serpent deceived me and I ate.

And she's right. The serpent did deceive her. Remember this. The lie of the enemy is always that you can push against God's law and it'll be all right. And now Eve is really understanding, no, it's not going to be all right.

There's always fallout. There's always consequences. Romans 6:23 says, the wages of sin, death. And that's how sin always pays out, in death. And we see it beginning almost immediately.

The life they knew, it's dead. The future relationship they have with each other there in the perfection of the garden. No, that's over. That intimacy, that walking in the cool of the evening with God. Well, even that moment is now going to look a lot different.

God doesn't begin with Adam and Eve. He turns his attention first to the serpent. He says, serpent, your sinfulness is your downfall. Your cleverness is your downfall. You will be at eternal odds now because of your deception with Eve's descendants, until one day, you're going to take it one step too far.

And you're going to snap at one of Eve's descendants, and he's going to turn around and crush, crush you. In fact, the way the scripture says is he will crush your head and you will strike his heel to Eve. He turns and says, eve, I love you. But sin has consequences. Here's the deal.

Because of sin and disobedience, life is going to be hard for you. Bearing children, rearing children. She will find out soon enough, will be really hard. Loving and caring for this man that I've given to you is going to be really hard at times. Anyone understand the curse on Eve and how it impacts our lives today?

Then he turns to Adam and says, listen. The same thing, providing for the people you love, is going to be really hard. And that is the end of scene three. And I picture this curtain closing, or the lights going down. And in the distance we hear and the bleeding of an animal is cut short.

And then in the next scene, we have Adam and Eve. And they're not dressed in leaves anymore. They actually have garments. And who prepared these garments for them? God prepared these garments for them.

God provided them with covering for their sin and their shame. The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and he clothed

them. And then he sends them out of the garden with no way to return. Says the scriptures say there's an angel with a guarding the entrance so that they cannot get back to that tree of life. And as we prepare for communion, here's why Eve is part of our Christmas story.

The paradise play of ancient times is still being played out in our lives. You know that we're still acting out the same lines that Eve gave there in chapter three. In act three, we've sinned. We've all allowed ourselves to be deceived by the enemy who says, you can do what you want. It'll be just fine.

No one's going to know. But it's not fine. And we can't fix it. Disobedience always carries consequences. Eden lost to us.

But God is good. Do you know that? God is good. We may have lost the paradise of Eden, but God has not abandoned us. And he did not abandon Eve.

I don't know what you think of when you think of Adam and Eve being cast out from the garden. There's a famous picture where they've got their heads down, they're being driven out, and it looks like the world is over for them. It's just a hardscrabble life from here on out. But if you look at the very next chapter, this will be Act 4, Scene 1. Eve has a baby.

And here's what she says. God has helped me. God has been with me. God is with me today, bringing forth this new life in my life. God does not abandon Eve.

God does not abandon Adam. He goes with them outside that garden. God stays faithful to Eve. Romans 8 says that we have a redeeming God, a God who takes bad things and brings about good for us and glory for him. God works in all things for the good of those who love him and who've been called according to his purpose.

God stays faithful to Eve. And even in her sin, he is still present and doing good things. And look at this. Eve stays faithful to God. She recognizes God's role in her life ongoing.

And even. Even if we cast her eyes just a little bit forward to that tragedy of her two children, Cain and Abel, we see something very important. Do you catch this? Eve continues to teach her children about God. And she teaches her children worship, how to worship God.

She taught her children about God and his promise. She taught her children the value of serving God and honoring God. And I don't think Eve ever forgets for any moment that one day God will do something through her to make the horrible thing that went wrong right again. The serpent will be destroyed once and for all. So let's jump from Act 1 or Act 1 of the Old Testament to the second act in the New

Testament.

Because Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is that avenging. That avenging son of Eve's Eve is. Jesus is the one who will crush the serpent. The serpent will strike. If you know the story of Jesus.

The serpent strikes. Jesus is crucified. He's buried. But then he rises again. Hebrews reminds us in Hebrews 2:14 that through death, Jesus destroyed the one who has the power of death.

That is the devil. That is the serpent.

And again, we use this verse early on in 1st John 3:8. The reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. Now we know who the devil is. And now we know what he did that destroyed it all for us. When we think of Christmas, our first image is of a baby in a manger.

But the Christmas story does not begin there. The Christmas story begins in a garden. And it doesn't start with Mary and her choice to be obedient. Lord, here am I. It begins with Eve and her decision to be disobedient.

And therein is the power of Christmas for me. You see, it is in my sin and brokenness. It is in my shame and humiliation that I meet a Savior who loves me enough to die for me. Because where my sin abounds, God's grace abounds even more. Isn't that incredible?

You see, in dying and rising again, Jesus destroys our tormentor. And in our shame and nakedness he clothes us in his righteousness and he casts his arms wide and he says, whosoever will return to the kingdom with me. I'm going to restore all things, make all things good again. I'm going to take you back to this place where heaven and earth meet. I want to take you back to Eden.

And it's all at hand. The kingdom is at hand, Jesus says, and it's yours if you want it. Romans 6:23 says, the wages of sin is death. Remember that. But here's the beautiful thing.

Our redeeming God says, even in death, I can turn and make good things happen. I'm going to gift you with this amazing thing. The gift of God is eternal life. In Christ Jesus our Lord. There's always consequences.

There are. But thankfully Jesus has paid the price. And we now all who whosoever will, may come to him for eternal life. Do you want back in? Would you like to go back to the garden?

Remember that angel at the entrance to guarding it? You can't get back to the Tree of Life. Well, Jesus says, I am the door. I am the way,

the truth, the life. And if you want to see the Father, go through me.

I am the way.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have made a way for us in our sin and disobedience. We said no to the good things of God and we decided we could do it better on our own. We trusted our own judgment better than yours. We trusted our own insights better than your truth. We trusted the lies of a friend other than the truth of our friend.

As we take the cup and we take the bread, we remember our own helplessness and we make a decision to put our trust in you.

Lord, if there are people here today who are burdened by the weight of the mistakes and disobedience that their life is now marked by, I pray that you would comfort them with this truth that to all who believe in him he gives the power to become sons of God. Lord, invite those who are far from you to come close to you today. And those of us who have surrendered our lives to you and trust you and are learning to trust you more. May this moment with the bread and the cup remind us of your great love for us. We pray all this in Jesus name.

Amen.

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