

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Genesis 3:16-24 at Victory of the Lamb on October 8, 2017.

**Series: Soul Searching**

**Today's Focus: Destiny—Where Are We Going When We Die?**

**“A Worldview Where Everything Sad Is Going to Come Untrue”**

As a dad I was delighted this last month that my oldest daughter wanted to read the Lord of the Rings books by J.R.R. Tolkien. Any of you ever read them? Watched the movies? This was a favorite series of mine when I was a boy. I think often of one line which resonates with me deeply. It's a line spoken by Samwise Gamgee when he wakes up to find his friends around him. He says, *“Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead! Is everything sad going to come untrue?”*

There is certainly a lot of *sad* in our world, isn't there? Monday morning I woke up to the hashtag #PrayForVegas. And of course we all know now the horrifically sad news out of Las Vegas—58 people killed, over 500 wounded in the worst mass shooting our country has seen in modern times. Why did this massacre happen? What's gone wrong? I think we all are able to agree that something has gone terribly, horribly wrong. Where we start running into trouble is explaining why.

Secular people today are often fond of saying there are no universal truths. Yet we can't escape the feeling that this is universally true—that we live in a world where something's fundamentally wrong. Moreover, I think we all have a deep sense too that it's not just murder that is wrong, not just that a massacre is wrong, but something about death itself is wrong.

Because no matter how much we hear about the progress of evolution, no one I've ever met can really quite bring themselves to celebrate death itself as something positively wonderful—something that weeds out the weak; something that is continually advancing our species so that the world just keeps getting better and better all the time. Atheists can boldly pronounce a thousand times over how freeing they think it is that one day their brain will simply cease to function when they die and how beautiful the thought that their body will become food for mushrooms that will feed the animals of the forest as part of the great circle of life. Yet no one I know has ever stood at the graveside of someone they loved and said, “Yay for death! Wins every time! What a great thing this is for our species. How wonderful that I will one day become mushroom food along with my loved ones.”

Instead in the world we actually live in, where death comes for us all, unpredictably yet inevitably, our reaction is more like that of Jesus. You know this story? Jesus had a friend named Lazarus. Lazarus had two sisters—Martha and Mary. Then one day Lazarus died. A couple days later Jesus arrived. The sisters run to tell Jesus, **“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”** (cf. John 11:32). Their words sound just like our own reaction to the ripping away that is death, don't they? Or any time there's what we perceive to be an untimely diagnosis or a tragic event, “Where were you, God? How could you let this happen?!” But now it was too late. Lazarus, Martha and Mary's beloved brother, was dead. Only...then come these stunning inspired sentences: **“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept.”** (John 11:33-35)

Now the thing is Jesus was already planning on raising Lazarus from the dead. Yet when he saw the grief of those who were mourning, we're told that Jesus was **“deeply moved in spirit and troubled”**. The expression literally means something like he was torn up inside with anger. In other words, when the

Son of God sees the devastation death causes whenever a loved one is seemingly ripped away from us...what does he feel? Gut-level righteous anger. God knows death isn't the way things were meant to be and he meets us in our anger over what's gone wrong. To give us a glimpse of just how much God cares for us we need only to look at Jesus—the living, breathing embodiment of God wrapped in our human flesh and blood. And what do we see? **Jesus wept.**

But to understand just what this means we have to go back to where the problem starts. The last couple weeks we've been exploring the Bible's first book—Genesis. When God created the world he made Adam and Eve as his special creatures. In love he placed them in the Garden of Eden. It was literally a paradise. A beautiful, fruitful, wonderful place. Marriage, work, worship and their whole world was designed to be fulfilling, joyful, and fun without anything frustrating, hurtful, painful or in vain.

But last week we heard what happened. Adam and Eve believed the devil's lies about God. "He isn't really good. He doesn't really love you. He doesn't want you to be truly happy. Did God really say anyway...?" So they doubted God's Word and they disobeyed God. They thought they would be happier if they sought their own self-fulfillment independent of and outside of God's will. So they ate the fruit about which God had warned them, "You will surely die." And then for the first time they realized they were naked. They were vulnerable. They felt deep shame. Insecurity robbed them of their true identity as children of God. Fear stirred in their hearts for the first time. So Adam invented the game "Hide" and hid behind a tree.

But, God invented a better game called "Hide and Seek" and found the first husband hiding behind a tree. Adam had failed to tenderly cultivate and protect his wife. He failed in his role of loving leadership. Yet God pursued this sinful, scared, insecure, prideful, excuse soaked, blame shifting guy. God started the reconciliation process by talking to Adam. He asked him a question, "**Where are you?**" (Gen. 3:8) It was an opportunity for Adam to repent. But as we saw last week, he didn't do that. He tried covering up his shame with flimsy fig leaves. He justified himself with even more flimsy excuses. Adam had something to prove. And God listens to him. Then God utters a curse. That's right, a curse.

But amazingly, God's curse wasn't spoken upon Adam or Eve! Rather, as we heard last week, it was spoken first and foremost upon Satan (cf. Ge. 3:14). This is significant. God curses the one who tempted the first married couple to listen to and live by a voice other than God's. And in the midst of God's curse on Satan we actually hear the first bit of good news for humankind! We hear God say, "**And I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your offspring [Satan] and hers; he [Jesus] will crush your head [Satan], and you [Satan] will strike his heel**" (Gen. 3:15). Pastor Bill explained this last week as the first promise of the Savior of the world. In other words the same day that Adam and Eve fell into sin, God's response to their rebellion against him wasn't to destroy them, but to promise them a Savior who would destroy Satan's power to accuse and condemn us all!

Amazingly, in the short term, Adam and Eve wouldn't immediately get the death they deserved. They would continue to live. Life in the midst of death would continue as they would have children. And in the future a descendant of Adam and Eve, a certain "He" would come as the Serpent Crusher. He would be a new and better Adam. He would do what Adam failed to do in the garden of Eden. He would keep all God's commands flawlessly. He would love his bride, the church, unconditionally. He would give up his life to protect and save her. He would take responsibility for her sins completely and by dying willingly he would become death's undoing. By Christ's death on the cross, he would break the devil's power to use the fear of death against us. By Christ's resurrection from the dead he would turn death into

something that actually leads to eternal life. And so Christ's resurrection victory would ensure for every believer that all death can ultimately do now is serve to make our lives infinitely *better*. Because the resurrection is true, everything sad is going to come untrue! This is the Christian worldview.

But of course there are still consequences of sin here on this earth that we must deal with—painful and bitter ones. These consequences come as the result of Eve's original attempt to find her independence and self-fulfillment outside of God and Adam's original failure to cultivate his wife's heart and protect her soul's well-being. And so this is what follows the great promise of Genesis 3:15...

**<sup>16</sup>To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."** We think about all the difficulties and heartaches involved sometimes in trying to conceive a child. We think of all the hardships of pregnancy and the pains associated with giving birth. We are sadly aware of how often a woman's most profound desire is to be with a wonderful husband yet who ends up not bringing her the fulfillment and happiness that she hopes for. Sadly we often we see a vulnerable woman taken advantage of, exploited, or abused by the man she in whom she places her highest hopes and dreams. All these consequences of sin strike at the deepest root of her aspirations of being a wife and mother. The problem as it's explained isn't with God's blueprint for marriage which God designed to bring us blessing upon blessing, but with men and women failing to follow it in a world marred by human sin.

**<sup>17</sup>To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup>It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."** We think about how arduous and unrelenting are the difficulties involved in making ends meet. How often work feels frustratingly unfulfilling. We strive and we sweat. We get stressed. The more we sacrifice for our career hoping that working harder will make us happier in the end, the more it leaves us feeling empty. We give it our all only to acquire the most meager quantities of the things we hope to attain anyway. And at the end of long periods of hard work...even our fleeting moments of relaxation and rest we often can't even enjoy them because of things we're worried about. And then, finally, this life of toil terminates in physical death—in the dissolution of our mortal body into the dust from which it was originally taken.

Have you ever experienced any of these things? Know anyone who has? The Bible is unflinchingly real and relevant, isn't it? And that's because it provides a cohesive and comprehensive worldview of the way the world actually is. What's gone wrong in the world? Sin. Whose sin? Our own as much as anybody else's. And yet even here we can learn something surprisingly wonderful. God can use even these consequences of sin, including our own, for our ultimate good when they serve as reminders of our never ending, tremendously deep need for a Savior.

**<sup>20</sup>Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. <sup>21</sup>The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. <sup>22</sup>And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." <sup>23</sup>So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. <sup>24</sup>After he drove the man out, he**

**placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.**

Friends, you and I were made to live forever! We were made to live life to the full in fellowship with God. God's good plan and purpose for human beings was that as the crown of his creation we would live in imperishable physical life in a world like the garden where death is impossible. Therefore a loving God could not and did not let Adam and Eve eat from that original tree of life in their fallen, sinful state. Imagine the horror of living broken forever in a broken world where one new tragedy comes along that continually outdoes another in terms of how terrible it is! But we can now imagine something else. Something better. A world where everything sad is going to come untrue! A world where we will get to eat from the tree of life and live forever without the potential for sin to wreck it all. This is the world that creation itself is longing for. **"For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God"** (Romans 8:20-21).

When Adam embraced God's promise of a Savior, the first thing he did was name his wife. "Eve" means "Life". Instead of believing that their sin and past choices doomed them to death, Adam believed in God's grace—that new life was ahead for their marriage. He believed that the Savior of the world would descend from his lineage. He took God at his word and believed the future could look brand new.

Friends, what would change in your life if you believed this too—that your life and your future could look brand new? There is simply no other worldview that offers the kind of hope that Christianity does. You see our hope isn't even just to die and go to heaven. Our hope, our goal, is the restoration of our soul with our new glorified body that God will give us in the new heaven and earth that Jesus will establish at the end of this age.

What happens when a person dies? For every human being, when we die our soul separates from our body. Our soul then immediately goes to one of two places—heaven for the believer in Jesus to begin experiencing the enjoyment of God's loving presence forever. Or Hell for the unbeliever who rejects Jesus to begin experiencing the unyielding torment of dwelling apart from God's loving presence. Hell is real, horrifying, and everlasting. There is no reprieve. There is no opportunity for repentance. But when a believer in Jesus Christ dies their soul immediately goes to be with the Lord in heaven to begin a life free from sin and all its consequences. In the meantime, the mortal remains of our body decays or returns to dust.

But our body is not destined to remain this way. The ultimate goal is the resurrection of the body—which we confess in the Apostles' Creed—and the reuniting of our immortal soul with our glorified body as believers made fit to live forever with God in the new heavens and earth. But don't think of the body as it is now—you know the one I'm talking about. The one that gets tired, creaky, wrinkly or cranky. Not the body that is broken, where our genes predispose us to certain diseases and rogue cells randomly decide to go all screwy. Not the one where our brain sometimes gets sick and even our best memories fade away. But a perfect body with a perfect mind—the physical life that we always wanted but never could even begin to dream of having in a world like this one where every good thing is marred by sin. I'm talking about a physical existence that is unimaginably glorious! This is God's promise for believers in Jesus.

A physical place like the garden of Eden was meant to be, only better. A place where work is fulfilling. Where joy is unending. Where there is no more misery or futility or frustration or pain. Where relationships flourish. Where love needs no boundaries or limits because there are no conflicts and we will have nothing to fear. Where all our earthly difficulties are gone and there are no more tragic events that make us weep. Where our worship is unhindered because our own doubts and insecurities will be no more.

This is why the Bible describes our final home as the new heaven and the new earth as it says, **“But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells”** (2 Peter 3:13). How is this possible? Because of the resurrection victory of Jesus Christ our Savior—the Almighty Commander in Chief of the Universe, the All-loving Lead Architect in Charge of the Afterlife, and the Heaven’s Chief Ambassador of Good News for All Mankind. **“We eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”** (Philippians 3:20-21).

Finally, what we can look forward to is that our final destination with God will be a place where we longer have to live by faith, because we will live by sight. Right now in our weakness we may sometimes look around and with tears in our eyes think, “Where is God?” But we won’t ever feel the need to do that in glory. Won’t have this deep longing to feel God’s presence. We will simply be in it. In a renewed creation beyond all human ingenuity and imagination! We will see God as he is. And everything sad will come untrue. Our tears will be dried, our grief turned to joy, and our pain nonexistent, not even a memory. It will be a new day, a better day—as it is written... **‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”** He who was seated on the throne said, **“I am making everything new!”** Then he said, **“Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true”** (Revelation 21:4-5). Amen!