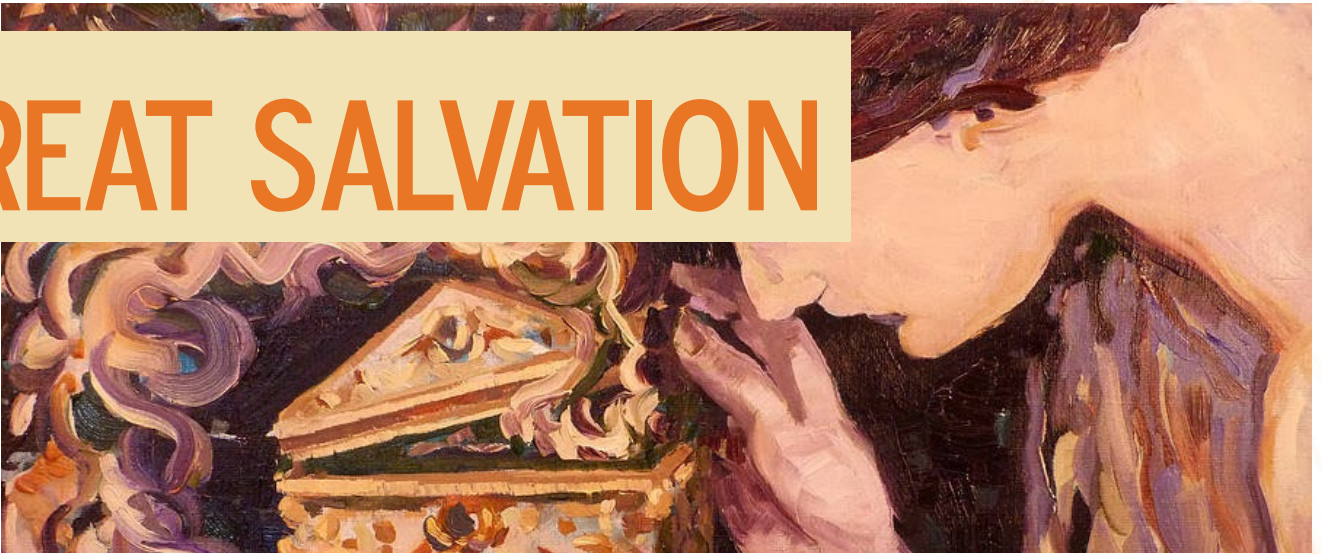


OUR

GREAT SALVATION



INTRODUCTION

In Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman created by the gods to appear on earth. The gods gave her beauty, charm and grace, but they also gave her a box; never to be opened. Eventually, Pandora succumbed to her curiosity and opened the box, releasing on the world all the evils that it contained. Only Hope remained inside.

According to the scriptures, our world is somewhat like Pandora's Box. In the Garden of Eden, the world was the way God intended. He blessed it with beauty, charm and grace, as humanity walked in relationship with God, but it was in that same garden that man rebelled against Him. The box was opened and sin poured into the world. Our world is fallen, and every human being is stained by sin. Needless to say, this world is NOT the way it was meant to be!

This world should be a place of goodness and compassion and love; a place of strong marriages and secure children, honesty and integrity. It should be without immorality, addictions, greed, bigotry and prejudice. Envision a place where government officials would take office and actually tell the truth, and scandal would be unheard of! God intended for this world to be a place where women wouldn't need to carry mace, and parents wouldn't worry about their children being abducted. We wouldn't be consumed with fear of big things, like rape and murder, or even smaller things, like credit fraud. Unfortunately, sin with all of its polluting, corrupting, addicting effects has entered reality, and our world is fallen. No one is untouched.

Despite the fact that we are riddled with sin, Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, came and taught in Israel for three years and died on the cross in 30 A.D. Because of Him and what he did for us all, the world is forever changed.

The purpose of this study is to take you deeper into getting this good news of Jesus, our great salvation from sin.

The Bad News: What happened in the garden?

Read Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-10; 3:23

- *Let's talk about this. Why do you think Adam & Eve hid themselves once they had sinned?*
- *What were some of the results of sin entering the world through their choice?*

This tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents the choice between independence from God or dependence on Him. Adam represented all of humanity, all of us, there in the garden. The choice that he made, on our behalf, was the choice to be our own gods or to acknowledge the one true God as Lord. In the garden, God desired that we would live in dependent on Him, our Creator, for life. He wanted us to choose not to eat from the tree and to just trust God's determination of good and evil for our lives; His discernment of right and wrong. But God gave us free will. When we chose to eat of the tree, we were essentially saying, "We are declaring our own independence from You. We will decide right and wrong on our own terms." When that decision was made, sin entered a previously sinless world, and Adam and Eve became fallen. As fallen people, their nakedness had changed from a state of innocence to something that they had to hide. They realized that they were stained and felt shame (3:7). They

feared God's judgment and hid from Him (3:8-9). They denied their own responsibility and attempted to justify their actions (3:10-19), and they even blamed God (3:12).

Notice that God did not sweep their sin under the rug as if it didn't matter. Instead, God's sense of justice demanded that Adam and Eve be held accountable for their sin. As a result, they were cursed by God along with all of creation (3:10-19). Their sin resulted in their banishment from the garden, and they were separated from God because of their sin (3:23). Since God had promised death as the result of disobedience (2:17), we learn something significant about it. Spiritual death is what Adam and Eve immediately experienced; being separated from God. In other words, spiritual death is the absence of spiritual life. It is the lack of a relationship with God. Physical death is what they, and all humanity, eventually experience as a result of sin.



The Christian message, called the good news, starts with a strong declaration of the bad news. Christianity asserts that every human being is fallen and stained with sin; needing to be brought back into a right relationship with God.

UNDERSTANDING THE FALL OF HUMANITY

Who, therefore, is fallen?

Read Romans 3:23 & 5:12. All are fallen. Everyone has sinned. We have all fallen short of God's standard, and we don't deserve God's glory, His greatness or His love anymore. Everyone has followed in Adam's footsteps of living independently from God. Because of sin, it's not just that the whole world has fallen, but also that I AM FALLEN from all that He intended for me to be.

But isn't humanity basically good?

Read Romans 3:10-12; Isaiah 64:6. No! Though we were created in God's image, to be loving, good and just, the fall has bent our nature away from God and to ourselves. Our very nature, the core of our being, is displeasing to God, since it bends away from God. In ancient times, leprosy was a common disease, and the law required that a leper announce himself by calling out, 'unclean,' so that no one would be contaminated by him through contact. A leper would contaminate those around him because of his condition; even if he tried to do them good. In the same way, we are spiritual lepers, whose condition makes even our good deeds unacceptable to God, because of our fallen nature. (Imagine a leper making you chocolate cookies as his friend. His attempt at kindness would be stained by his condition.)

What has the fall done to our relationship with God?

Read Isaiah 59:2. The fall has wrecked humanity's relationship with God. Essentially, through Adam, all humanity told God to shove off. Now, we enter this world at birth NOT having a relationship with God; being infinitely separated from God.

What is the ultimate consequence for our sin?

Romans 6:23 says that "the wages of sin is...death." Just like Adam and Eve, what we earn for our sin is both immediate and eventual. Immediately, we exist in spiritual death, which is separation from God. Eventually, we will experience physical death as well. There are many words that could describe our position before God:

Sick - needing to get better

Ignorant - needing to be educated

Misguided - needing to be redirected

Yet the scripture says we are dead, absolutely lifeless and powerless to have relationship with God, unless He does something to change us and bring us to life.

Why doesn't everyone realize they're spiritually dead and worthy of God's punishment?

Read Jeremiah 17:9. To say our hearts are deceitful is to describe our tendency to deceive, or mislead or lie to someone. The main person we deceive is ourselves. We tell ourselves, "I am a good person" until the scriptures are used to help us understand we are NOT good, and are actually spiritually cut off from God.

- *What were the consequences on us of Adam & Eve disobeying God in the garden?*
- *In your own words, describe our condition or status before God.*
- *How does that make you feel?*

A SUMMARY OF THE BAD NEWS

The Bad News is that we have a sin record before God. That means we all have a criminal record before a holy God who has witnessed every action, every word, every thought. More than that, we have a sinful nature. That means our very core is fallen, so even if we could somehow get our criminal record wiped clean, we'd still keep sinning because our nature is bent away from God. We also exist in spiritual separation from God, being spiritually dead; unable to save ourselves.

Our world tells us we are basically good, and that forgiveness is not even needed. But this is a denial of what scripture reveals about us. We have a sinful nature.

Religion tells us we can save ourselves; that our good works can somehow carry more weight than our sin and make us acceptable to God. This is a denial of what scripture reveals about God; that a holy God cannot overlook sin.

THE GOOD NEWS: WHAT HAPPENED AT THE CROSS?

God promised long ago that He would provide a Savior, the Messiah, to save us from our sins. The Messiah would not only forgive His people for their sins, but bring them into His kingdom; into a relationship with Him as their king.

The gospel of Jesus is the good news that **the kingdom of God** is here, and we are invited to enter and become new people through turning from sin and turning to God (repentance).



Our sin was paid for on the cross

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. All of sin is a rejection of God. It's a declaration that to decide good and evil without God; just like in the garden. Therefore, God rejected Jesus. He made Jesus to be sin on the cross. Sin separates us from God. Therefore, God separated Himself from the Son that He loved. On the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) And just like we inherited a sinful nature from Adam because of his choice, we can inherit perfect righteousness before God because of Jesus' choice. Becoming the righteousness of God is not something that any human being can ever attain. It can be received only as a gift from God. Christ's death on the cross removed our sin from us, so God could give us His righteousness.

What happened at the cross is that the work of saving us was fully accomplished

Read John 19:30. The work of Jesus on the cross paying for our sin is all that needed to be done. There is nothing that we can do can add to it.

What happened at the cross is that the path to knowing God was opened

Read 1 Peter 3:18. The barrier between humanity and God, our sin, was removed at the cross. Jesus can bring us to God, if we believe.

What happened at the cross is that we were justified before God

Read Romans 3:23-24. To be justified is to be regarded by God just as if we had never sinned. Or, to put it another way...

*God treated Jesus as if He had lived your life,
so that God could treat YOU as if you had lived Jesus' life.*

What happened at the cross is that though we deserved death, God gave us life freely

Read Romans 6:23. We existed in spiritual death, that is, in absence of relationship with God, yet He freely gives us eternal life. This is not something that begins later in heaven, but a relationship with God, now, which extends into eternity. The good news of the gospel of Jesus is that the Kingdom of God has come, and that He, the Messiah, will freely give eternal life to any who will repent and come to Him.

Salvation is called the “incredible gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15). For the rest of our lives, as believers, we will further unwrap this gift, comprehending more and more of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

- *In your own words, can you describe what it means that Jesus paid for our sins?*
- *How does that affect you?*
- *Have you ever fully understood this before?*
- *What do you think is an appropriate response to the cross?*

OUR RESPONSE TO THE CROSS

We respond to the good news with faith

Read John 3:16, Revelation 3:20. Responding to the good news with faith means trusting in what He did for us on the cross, rather than on what we suppose we can do for Him. Believing the gospel of God’s love leads us to want to receive Christ into our lives.

Responding to the good news with repentance

Read Acts 3:12-19. Repentance is turning around. It is becoming aware of the sins you have committed as a result of being independent from God and desiring to be forgiven and changed.

Responding to the good news is acknowledging who Christ is and what he has done

Read Romans 10:9-10. Confessing Christ as Lord means recognizing that His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave reveal Him as the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. In marriage, once a person takes a person to be his wife, he is married. Once a person confesses Christ as Lord, according to the scripture, they will be saved.

- *What would hold you back from receiving Christ into your life as Lord and Savior?*

SUMMARY

Pandora's Box has definitely been opened. We can see the effects of a fallen world everywhere, but God has entered this fallen world through Jesus; revealing His love through Jesus' death on the cross. There are three ways to respond to God's revelation of Himself and His plan for this world:

- 1. Irreligion (relativism):** I ignore the cross and decide my own truth and meaning in this world outside of God.
- 2. Religion (moralism):** I reject the cross and trust in my own ability to obey God to be accepted by Him.
- 3. Gospel (Christianity):** I believe the cross and trust that His death for me makes me perfectly accepted in Jesus.