

## **Cross Culture**

God's Story, Our Story

Dr. David Platt

May 27, 2007



## **God's Story, Our Story Genesis 3:1-24**

Well, if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Genesis 3. Go ahead and strap on your seatbelts; I didn't get to preach last week, so we have a lot ground to cover this morning. We're going to do things a little different, though. I want to welcome you this morning, not just to worship, but to class. I am your professor, David Platt, and for the next few weeks, we're going to do things a little different.

I'm convinced one of the greatest inadequacies in the church today is the fact that many, I would even say most, Christ-followers struggle with an inability and uncomfotability when it comes to sharing the gospel, sharing our faith, with other people. The majority of us in this room do not feel confident in sharing our faith with other people, and as a result, the majority of us in this room rarely, if ever, throughout our Christian lives share our faith with people outside of our families. Now, we've seen that in disciple-making, sharing the Word is the first non-negotiable component of making disciples of all nations.

So, what are we going to do then? Most of us don't feel comfortable sharing the Word, and we are supposed to make disciples of all nations, so what do we do? Do we start an evangelism class? I think if we do that, then a very few of us will actually sign up for it. Time, commitments, schedule, most of the people that sign up for it will probably be people who are already sharing their faith. So, what we are going to do is we are going to take the next six weeks, and we're going to have class in here. So, I want to welcome you to "How to Share Your Faith." What we're going to do is, over the next six weeks, we are going to walk through how to share the gospel in a meaningful way with those around us.

So, what you've got on the front page of your sermon notes there is the syllabus for the course. For some of you, it's been a long time since you saw one of these things. This is the syllabus. Some of you are in high school, and you are thinking, "I thought we got rid of those this last week." Well, you've got one now on Sunday morning. So, here we go; here's the syllabus for the course, and I want us to dive in and give you an overview of this series and where we're headed, and then, we're going to start class together.

First, "The Mission: The Church of Brook Hills exists to awaken the passion for the glory of God by making disciples of all nations." That's what we've seen; we've seen how this whole thing is tied with the series we just got out of, "Awaken", where we saw the glory of God in worship, and that propels us to make disciples. Make disciples starts with sharing the Word.

Now, the course purpose...this is huge. The course purpose: The purpose of this course is to equip, enable, and empower the people of The Church of Brook Hills to share the Word in any culture they live or serve in. Now, this is huge because I have been a pastor for almost a year now, so admittedly, I've got a lot still left to learn. I realize that. However, at the same time, in the short time I have had the opportunity of pastoring, I look at the

contemporary church scene, particularly the megachurch scene, and I see that we have created a situation where the church is expected to, week by week, put on a stellar performance for people, provide the programs that would bring the most people in, and the church is going to use that program and performance to draw people to Christ. So, the key to having a successful church is to have a great worship service with a very charismatic communicator that we can bring people who don't know Christ to listen to, and they'll be led to Christ by that person in that setting, and that's how we've built the success of the church. Admittedly simplistic, probably overly simplistic, but I think true.

What I want to say to us this morning is that, even as effective as people may believe that strategy to be, I don't believe that is what God is leading us to do at The Church at Brook Hills. Because I think we have created...we have a tendency to create an unhealthy dependence on the institution of the church to do the work of Jesus Christ that He has called each of us to do in each of our own lives. That creates an unhealthy dependence on the institutional church to do the "right stuff" and put on the "right show" week in and week out in order to impact this community for the glory of Christ.

One of the underlying presuppositions of that whole picture that I think is faulty is the idea that most of the people in Birmingham who don't know Christ, the most effective way to get them to know Christ is to bring them in here, when in fact the majority of people who don't know Christ in Birmingham are never going to come in the doors of this building. However, there are people throughout this room that are going to rub shoulders with people all in this community for the next six days of this week. So, maybe, instead of using all of our resources to put on the right performance and get the right programs to bring them into one location, or maybe even multiple locations, at a particular time during the week...maybe we should use all of our resources to raise up the best people who will go out into this community and impact this community for the glory of Christ in the way we live our lives.

I was having a conversation this last week with a good friend and a megachurch leader, who I was sharing with about our worship series. I was talking about how our worship services were not primarily geared around unbelievers, people who don't know Christ. They are actually geared around engaging people who do know Christ with the glory of God, propelling us to go out into this community and this world to proclaim the glory of Christ wherever we go. He was surprised, really kind of shocked by that whole picture, and he said, "Well, how then, David, if that's so..." and he even went so far as to say, "It seems counter-intuitive." He said, "How is Brook Hills going to engage people who don't know Christ in this community?" I said, "Well, our people are going to engage those people day in and day out as they live next to them, and live with them, and work next to them, and shop next to them. Wherever they go, they are going to engage them."

He was still a little confused, and he said, "Well, how are those people going to come to know Christ?" I said, "Well, our people are going to lead them to Christ." He was surprised, and he said, "Well, if your people lead them to Christ, then how are they going to grow in Christ?" I said, "Well, our people are going to be equipped to teach them how to be disciples of Christ." I said, "I really would like to see the people of God unleashed to do the work of God without dependence on the institutional church to do the work for them." He said, "That's interesting."

So, I got in the car, and if I could be completely honest with you, I was dumbfounded. This one year old pastor, thinking, "Have I just missed it completely?" Then, I was reminded of

something that I want to reiterate to you this morning. I want to reiterate that I believe in you. I believe in the people of God, and I believe in the power of Christ at work in the people of God. I believe that when the people of God rise up, equipped and enabled and empowered to make the gospel known and impact the world for the glory of Christ, the results we will see are much greater than if it were all dependent on me. It's one thing for me to be equipped, enabled and empowered to proclaim the Word and lead people to Christ. It's a whole other ballgame when 4,000 people who worship here today are equipped, enabled, empowered to go out this week and make an impact on this world for the glory of Christ. So, the success of our church is based, is staked on men and women throughout this room taking responsibility for the opportunity and mission we have to make disciples of all nations, and I'm praying that God would use His people to show that it is people, not programs or performances, that are God's method for winning the world to Himself.

So, that's the course purpose; that's the driving purpose behind the course, okay? Next, the course objectives. This is the takeaway. You go through this course over the next six weeks, then at the end of this course, we will have a holistic understanding of the salvation that God has given to us. We will also have a greater awareness of how the gospel relates to different cultures in the world. As a result...here's the main takeaway...we will all be able to share our story and the gospel story in any context as we join with God in the work of making disciples of all nations.

Now, that last sentence, we stick through this thing, and we work hard over the next six weeks, we are going to be there, okay? So, you walk with me through this, and we will be there, able to share our story and the gospel story in any context we find ourselves in, joining God in the work of making disciples of all nations.

Now, here's the outline; here's where we are going over the next six weeks. We'll examine...number one, week one, today...we will examine the consequences of sin in Genesis 3 and understand how our story fits into God's overall story of salvation. Week Two: We will explore Jesus' approach to bringing the Father's salvation to the world and consider the implications of how we, too, can be involved in God's work just like Jesus was. Week Three: We'll see how the gospel makes the guilty innocent before God and learn how to share the gospel in guilt-based cultures. That may not make a lot of sense right now, but that's where the cross-cultural component is going to come in. We're going to begin to think about how we can share the gospel, not only in our culture, but in other cultures. In the next couple of months, over 1,500 people from this church will be going to other cultures, taking the gospel. So, I think it's timely for us to think about how the gospel relates to other cultures.

Week Four: We'll see how the gospel provides the power to overcome fear of God and learn how to share the gospel in fear-based cultures. Week Five: See how the gospel brings honor to all who have shame before God and learn to share the gospel in shame-based cultures. Then, Week Six will culminate everything as we see that God has designed to use us to display His power and His glory in leading people to Christ.

Here's the methodology; here's how we are going to approach this thing. This course will be composed of corporate worship, teaching from the Word, participation in in-class activities, okay? So, we are going to have an in-class activity today. We're going to participate in this thing; we're not just going to observe and be spectators throughout this thing, but we're going to participate in this thing. Then, homework assignments. This is the part I really

thought you would enjoy, okay? Homework assignments. You're going to have homework to do after each week, and ultimately, the personal involvement of men and women in sharing the gospel.

Textbooks: the Bible. I encourage you to bring your Bible, and there's a book that has really had a huge impact on me when it comes to training, especially in some of the house church stuff I've had an opportunity to do in other cultures training people to share the gospel. It's a book called *Honor and Shame*. It's short; about a hundred page book, and I read it a couple of years ago when I was going to a house church training. I said, "If I ever have the opportunity, I am going to put this book in front of anybody who is going into another culture to share the gospel." So, that's something we will have available out in the "Brook Store" out there if you'd like it, or you can look it up and get that if you'd really like to go extra.

## **God's Story... From our sin to His salvation.**

So, that's the picture; that's the syllabus. Are we ready to dive into this thing? Okay, all right. There are cameras in the room that will be taking attendance every week, so make sure you are there. Okay, God's story and our story. We're going to start in Genesis 3 with the entrance of sin...I was just kidding about the camera stuff, all right...with the entrance of sin into the world. The whole mission of the church exists because sin exists; the whole mission of the church of God exists because of sin and the effects of sin and addressing those effects in all people in all cultures.

Genesis 1, 2, and 3 are really foundational for understanding the rest of the Bible. If we miss the meaning of Genesis 3, it's like trying to read a novel and skipping the first few chapters and going on with the rest of it without understanding the basis on which everything else is built. We'll never understand why we need a Savior, why He would need to die, why He would need to be risen from the grave, why He would need to come back, why He would, ultimately, destroy creation and create a new heaven and a new earth...we don't understand any of that until we understand Genesis 3.

So, I want us to start this morning by reading the first ten verses of Genesis 3, and I want us to get a picture of the beginning of God's story. Look in verse 1.

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"*

*"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with*

*her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

### **Creation's Problem: Our Sin.**

Now, if you were here back in November, you know that we studied, in depth, this whole chapter. What I want us to do is hone in on two facets of God's story that are introduced in Genesis 3. First of all, our problem...our problem is our sin. I want us to see, in this passage, three primary effects, three primary consequences of sin entering into the world, because this picture has affected every single one of us in this room. Three effects of sin once Adam and Eve ate from this tree, what were the effects that happened?

Well, we'll start in verse 7. *"The eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."* First of all, the first consequence of sin is that we are guilty before God, and we know it. It wasn't just that they realized they were naked; they had lost their innocence here. All of a sudden, the sting of their consciences was felt, and they knew the difference between right and wrong, and they knew that they had done wrong. They knew that they needed to do something to try and hide that. So, they made coverings for themselves. We are guilty before God, and at this point, guilt is now passed on to all humanity. Right and wrong and the overwhelming sense that all of us have, at some point, done wrong. We are guilty before God.

Second effect of sin is that we have shame before God. It says that *"they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden."* Now, what's interesting is, if you back up to Genesis 2:25, right before Genesis 3, it says, *"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no..."* What? *"...shame."* No shame before each other and before God, but as soon as sin enters the world, here they are hiding from God, ashamed to even be in front of Him. Their shame leads to blame. Adam blames Eve, and really, ultimately, blames God. He says, *"This is the woman that you put here with me that caused this."* Shame leads to blame, and here we have a picture of shame before God as a result of sin. All loss of honor in the presence of God.

We are guilty before God, we have shame before God, and third, we are afraid of God. It says, *"But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'"* Then, verse 10, *"He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'"* This is a drastically different picture than what we have seen up to this point in the Bible. In Genesis 1 and 2, we see man and woman; we see them enjoying the presence of God, rushing into the presence of God, pouring out their love and affection on God. Now, when God's presence is felt in Genesis 3 after sin has entered the world, they run in fear. They are scared to be anywhere near Him. Terror has now replaced what was once joy as a result of sin's interest into the world.

So, here's the picture: They knew they had done something wrong, they were ashamed of that, and in trying to cover that, they hid from God. They were afraid of Him. I remember a few years ago when I had the opportunity to go to a monastery. I don't know if you've ever spent any time in a monastery, but I wanted some time...there were some decisions I was making in my life at that time, and I wanted some time to just get away and be quiet. So, I went to this monastery for a weekend where I would not talk the whole time, and basically, they had it set up at this particular monastery where you could stay there, and you could eat there.

However, I missed the orientation when I got there when they explained the parts of the monastery you were able to go into and the parts you were not. There are some parts that are reserved just for the monks, and I missed that whole thing. So, I was wandering around on my first morning there, and I was exploring, and I opened this one particular door, and it opened into this beautiful courtyard. Nice plants and everything around, with a fountain in the middle of this beautiful courtyard, and I start walking along the outside of the courtyard, and I look in the windows that are surrounding the courtyard, and I see where the monks eat, and I see where the monks study.

As I'm walking through there, I start to realize, "You know, I don't think this is where I'm supposed to be. It may be one of those 'outlawed' places." At that point, there was a monk who came into the courtyard from the other side. He opened the door, and I panicked. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to get caught by a monk in the wrong place. So, I literally dove behind a bush. Unfortunately, a true story. I dove where I was pinned between the bush and this column that was right behind me, and this monk starts walking around the courtyard, and I'm just sweating profusely. I am just praying, "God, I know he has spent a lot more time with you than I have. However, I would really like for you to get me out of this particular situation." There I am hiding, and he's walking, literally, like feet from me, right behind me as I'm hiding behind this bush. If he finds me, what am I going to say then? I'll be honest, part of me was tempted to kind of jump out and scare him, but then I would have broken that whole vow of silence thing, and I would have been worse off. So, I didn't. I just sat there, and finally, he left, went out of the courtyard, and I bolted out the other side and got out of there. That was a situation where I knew, instantly, something had gone wrong, I was ashamed to be caught in that situation and afraid of what this monk might do to me if I were caught.

Now, that's the picture in Genesis 3, although it is on a far deeper, far more significant level. If we do not understand the gravity of Genesis 3, we won't understand the rest of the Bible. If we, in any way, minimize the seriousness of sin in Genesis 3, as we are tempted to do in our own lives today in a relativistic culture that seeks to redefine and minimize sin, then we'll miss the whole point of why we need the gospel. At this point, man was separated from God for all of eternity, and he was afraid for good reason. In Genesis 2:17-18, God had told Adam that if he ate from this tree, he would die. No wonder he was afraid; no wonder this was a serious thing. We have got to realize that it's at this point, in Genesis 3:10, that it makes complete sense to leave man and woman in their guilt, in their fear and in their shame. If we desire justice, then that means, at this point, that we desire our death and our separation from God forever. This is an extremely serious picture here. That's the problem, our sin.

### **The Creator's Resolution: His Salvation.**

Thanks be to God, though, He doesn't leave us there. He begins, from the very beginning of Scripture, to make a way for man to have a resolution to his sin. Creation's problem is our

sin, and the Creator's resolution is His salvation. I want you to see how we go from sin to salvation right here at the very beginning of the Bible. I want you to get your Bibles ready, because I want us to trace how this takes place, not just right here in Genesis 3, but throughout the rest of this book.

How does God react? First of all, He seeks the guilty. He seeks the guilty. In verse 9, "*The LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'*" That's a pretty interesting reaction to man's sin. Deserving death, and God comes to him and says, "Where are you?" Here we see, for the first time, the Father seeking out His children; God seeking out those who have deliberately disobeyed and rebelled against Him, and it's the same picture we see throughout Scripture. Abraham, an idolator, and God seeks after him. We see Moses, a fugitive in Midian, and God is seeking after Moses. We see Elijah, literally, running from God and the task that God had given him, and God comes seeking after him.

We see Jesus doing this with His disciples in the Gospels. One of my favorite pictures of the disciples is in Mark 2:14, when Jesus calls Matthew. Matthew, a tax collector sitting on the side of the road, and Jesus comes up to him, initiates a conversation with him and calls him to Himself. Over and over, we see the whole mission of Jesus. Luke 19:10, "Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost." God who seeks the guilty.

I want you to see this unfold. Turn with me two books to the right to the book of Leviticus. I want you to look at Leviticus 5, and you might write down these verses, and maybe mark them in your Bible. Basically, I want to trace how God responds to our guilt, how God responds to our shame and how God responds to our fear, all throughout Scripture. Look at Leviticus 5:5-6. These concepts are repeated, literally, hundreds and hundreds of times throughout Scripture. I want you to see just an overview, a broad stroke, so to speak. Look at Leviticus 5:5-6. This is when God is setting up the offerings that need to be given to cover up for sin. He says, "*When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what he has sinned and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him and for his sin.*" So, from the beginning, here in Leviticus, God is making a way to cover over people's guilt.

Keep turning to the right, and you will come to Ezra. 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, go to Ezra 9. Ezra 9 is, really, chronologically towards the very end of the Old Testament. We have seen chronologically the very beginning of the Old Testament; let's look at the end of the Old Testament. Ezra 9, look with me at verse 6. This is a prayer that Ezra is praying. I want you to hear what it says, and how he talks about their guilt. Guilt is still a problem at the end, chronologically, of the Old Testament. Look at the beginning of this prayer in verse 6. It says,

*O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and [here it is] our guilt has reached to the heavens. From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today.*

Then, you get to the end of this prayer. Look at verse 13, "*What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this.*" Look at the last verse,

verse 15. *"O LORD, God of Israel, you are righteous..."* In other words, you are innocent; you are completely good. *"We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence."* So, the beginning of the Old Testament, the people of God, plagued with guilt. The end, chronologically, of the Old Testament, people are plagued with guilt.

Let's go to Jesus then. Look at John 8. Go over to the New Testament with me and look at John 8. How does Jesus relate to this guilt? In John 8, look with me in verse 46. This is Jesus having a conversation with religious leaders who were constantly embroiled by finding a way to overcome their guilt by doing this, this and this. They had all kinds of laws to try to remove their guilt, and they were strict with those laws to try and stay innocent before God. Look at John 8:46. In this dialogue that Jesus is having with these guys, you might underline this verse. He says, *"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?"* Here is Jesus coming on the scene in the book of John, and He says, "I'm not guilty at all." This is a major break in the rest of Scripture because He is coming on the scene and, for the first time, we are seeing somebody who does not have the guilt problem that we saw in Genesis 3.

Now, Jesus leaves the earth after He rises from the grave. Now, look over to John 16. The Bible says that Jesus sends His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, down to us. What's the whole purpose of the Holy Spirit? Look in John 16:8. It says, talking about the Holy Spirit, *"When he comes..."* Listen to this, *"...he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer..."* So, the Spirit's whole purpose is to convict us, help us understand our guilt.

One more text...we won't turn there, but it may be familiar to many of us. 2 Corinthians 5:21. You might write that down. Do you remember what God said there? *"God made him who had no sin..."* Who had no guilt, whatsoever. *"...to be sin for us, in order that we might become..."* What? *"...the righteousness of God."* In other words, God poured out the guilt of our sin in Jesus Christ, so that we could stand righteous, in other words, innocent before God. God, throughout all of Scripture, is taking man's guilt and making us innocent through what Jesus did. This is salvation. He is seeking after the guilty, and there is nothing, no one in this room, whose guilt is so great that God does not seek after us to cover over our guilt with the innocence, the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's good news. This is His salvation...from our sin, to His salvation.

So, that's guilt. Second, what does God do? We'll come back all the way to Genesis 3. He seeks the guilty, but second, we've still got the shame problem. So, what does God do? He covers the shameful. He covers the shameful. When you get to Genesis 3:21, do you remember what Adam and Eve tried to do when they realized their shame? They tried to cover themselves with leaves. It says in verse 21, *"The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and he clothed them."* Their clothing was insufficient, the leaves, and God says, "I am going to make garments for you." He says, "Garments of skin."

Now, what does that mean? This is subtle, but we're tempted to miss it. This is the first time death enters, literally, into the Bible, because, here we have God taking the skin of an animal. In order to take the skin of an animal, that animal can no longer be living. So, God takes the death of an innocent animal and uses the death, the sacrifice of that animal, to cover over man's sin. He covers the shameful through the sacrifice.

This is a theme that begins to run through the rest of the Bible. Look at the very next chapter, Genesis 4. Look at verses 3-4. Remember Abel and Cain? It says, *"In the course of time..."* Verse 3, *"Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor upon Cain and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor."* Why? What was the difference? Abel's offering was a sacrificial offering, just as we had seen God inaugurate in Genesis 3.

You get over a few chapters to the right, you come to Genesis 8:20. Noah has built an ark, and he's been saved from the flood, him and a lot of animals. It says in verse 20, after the flood, *"Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it."* So, what we are seeing here in the very beginning of Genesis and is delineated, expounded, over the next four books of the Bible, a sacrificial system where God would take the offering of an animal, and that would be used to, in a sense, cover over. The word that Leviticus uses is "atone for", which means, "cover over the sins of His people." God is in the business of covering the shameful. Man could not do it on his own, so God was taking the initiative to do that for Him, through these sacrifices.

Now, fast forward. Let's go to one of the prophets. Go to Isaiah 53. Keep turning. I know we are all over the place, but I want you to see how these themes develop throughout Scripture. Look at Isaiah 53. One of the greatest pictures of all of Scripture when it comes to our shame and the honor of God. Listen to this. Isaiah 53:4. This is a prophecy, speaking about Jesus Christ. Look in Isaiah 53:4. Speaking about Jesus, it says, *"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows..."* Now, I want you to picture who the shame is put on in this picture, and who honor is given to.

*...yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds, we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned in his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity [the sin] of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence nor was any deceit in his mouth.*

Do you see the picture? Shame being put on Christ, and honor being given to us. Look over to the very next chapter, verse 4. In response to this, listen to what God tells His people. Isaiah 54:4,

*Do not be afraid; you will not suffer [What?] shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband – the LORD Almighty is his name – the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.*

He has taken your shame away. You don't even remember it anymore. It's the same thing a few chapters over. Go to Isaiah 61. This is a passage that Jesus quotes in Luke 4 at the

very beginning of His ministry. Hear what Isaiah 61 says that sums up Jesus' ministry. Start the middle of the way through verse 1 there. It says,

*He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release of darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God - to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.*

You see the reversals that are going on there because of what Christ has done. You get over to verse 7, it says, *"Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs."* Now, that's the picture in the Old Testament. God is saying, "There is coming a day when your shame is going to be covered with my honor", and God is going to put man's shame on His servant.

Then, you get to the very end...go to the last book in the Bible, Revelation 19. This is the journey that started back in Genesis 3. Let's put it together with that happens at the end. Revelation 19. What you've got is a crowd of people...this is a passage we studied a few weeks ago...gathered around, singing praises to Jesus. Giving honor to Him. Why? Listen to this. This is the picture here. He says in Revelation 19:7, *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come..."* The Lamb? Who's the Lamb? Well, John 1:29, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."* The Lamb has come, *"and his Bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."* What you've got is a picture of God's people not dressed in the stains of their sins, but dressed in bright linen, white, clean to wear.

Then, you get over to Revelation 21 and look at the very last verse in Revelation 21. It's talking about heaven, and it says, verse 27, *"Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."* In the very beginning of the Bible...don't miss this...in the very beginning of the Bible, man cannot cover over his shame by himself. He needs someone to do it for him, and God takes an innocent animal and uses the sacrifice of that innocent animal to cover over man's shame. It is a story that continues on throughout the Old Testament.

When you get the New Testament, God takes an innocent Lamb, His very own Son, and He takes Him, and He pours out the shame of our sin on Christ in this sacrifice, so that, you and I can stand before Almighty God with no shame in us, with honor before God because of what Christ has done for us. He covers the shameful. This is the story of the Bible. From our sin to His salvation. He has covered us.

So, He seeks after the guilty; He covers over the shameful. To know, that no matter what we've done in this room and no matter what our past holds, there is a God who promises to cover over our shame with His honor.

Then, finally, He protects the fearful. He protects the fearful. Let's go on one more journey. Start back in Genesis 3. He protects the fearful. We already mentioned in Genesis 2:17, God had told man, *"When you eat of this, you will surely die."* However, then you get to Genesis

3:20, and Adam names his wife...what does he name his wife? Okay, this is audience participation in class. He names his wife what? Eve. He names his wife Eve. What does Eve mean? The mother of all the living. That's a weird name to give Eve when, in Adam's eyes, she is the one that caused death to come into this whole picture. He names her Eve. Why? Because God had already started protecting them from that fate.

In Genesis 3:15...this is what we studied last November...we saw that God gave a promise that through the line of Eve would come a Savior who would crush Satan. So, what we've got is a picture from the very beginning of, even in his fear, God protecting Adam and Eve.

What does He do? He banishes them from the garden, and He says, "They cannot eat from this tree of life and live forever." Why would God do that? It says in verse 23-24, "*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.*" Well, He doesn't want Adam and Eve...He's protecting them from eating of the tree and living in this state forever. Man doesn't want to live in a state of guilt and fear and shame forever. So, God is protecting His people here.

What we have, as a result of that, throughout the rest of the Bible is a fear of being in the presence of God because of our sin. It's a very real fear. It is a real terror. Go over to the next book, the book of Exodus. Look at Exodus 3. Let me show you a couple of instances of this. Look at Exodus 3. This is a picture of Moses. Moses was a guy who we hail as a hero of the faith. This is when God is seeking after him. I want you to listen to what Exodus 3:4 says. Remember when God appears to Moses in a burning bush? So, Moses walks by, and he sees this burning bush over here, so he goes over there, and verse 4,

*When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." [Listen to this] At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.*

He was afraid to look at God. There's a fear there. Go over in the same book to Exodus 20. This is right after God gives His people the Ten Commandments. I want you to listen to how the people respond. Exodus 20:18. Look at Exodus 20:18. After the Ten Commandments had been given, it says, "*When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with...*" What? "*...with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."*" Here they are afraid to be in the presence of God.

Now, this continues throughout. Remember Isaiah 6? Isaiah encounters God, and he is afraid, "*Woe is me...For I a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips...*" In other words, "I have got sin, and I have reason to be afraid in the presence of God." It continues throughout.

Go to the last book in the Bible, Revelation 6. Look at how, even near the very end of the Bible, we are seeing this picture of fear for all those who still are in their sin. Look at Revelation 6:15. What we've got here is a group of people who are described, who still have sin in their lives, who have not had their shame covered, who have not had their guilt turn into innocence. So, they've got reason to be afraid of God; they have sin in their lives. Listen to this, Revelation 6:15,

*Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

Sound familiar? Hiding from God; they can't get near God.

Thankfully, though, that is not where the story ends. Go to Revelation 22. I want you to look with me at Revelation 22. Remember the story at the very beginning, Genesis 3, when the man and woman are cast out, banished from the garden, flaming sword that keeps them from going back in to the tree of life. Listen to this. Verse 1, *"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of..."* What? *"...life."* It's back. *"...bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse."*

Don't miss the picture here. Sin has pervaded all the different pages of people's lives throughout this book, but there is coming a day where there will be no more curse. It says, *"The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him."* Now, before we read this next verse, look up here. Remember, man banished from the presence of God, fearful in His presence; afraid to even go in His presence. That's the picture of what we've got in Scripture until you get to Revelation 22:4, where it says, *"They will see his face."* And they won't be afraid. Why? Because God has promised to protect the fearful. He has taken our fear and, once again, turned it into joy. Underline those words, *"They will see his face."* You realize, ladies and gentlemen, there is coming a day when we will see the face of God and experience eternal joy in His presence. He protects the fearful.

Now, that's the picture of our sin and His salvation. God's story: He is seeking after the guilty; He is covering the shameful, and He's protecting the fearful. All three of those are components in biblical salvation. I think we have a tendency, though, to isolate some of those and focus on one as opposed to the others. I have talked with many believers who know that they're innocent of their sin, not guilty of their sin, but they still walk around with the shame of their sin from the past. Many of us know we are right before God, but many of us are still plagued by all kinds of fears in this world.

I think part of that relates to the different cultures that we live in. What we are going to see later on in this series is we are going to look in depth to each one of those consequences of sin, and what God has done in response to them, and I want us to think about how that may help us understand different cultures better. That's Weeks 3, 4, 5.

### **Our Story... From our sin to His salvation.**

However, at this point, here's what I want us to do. I want us to take a step deeper, not just in God's story, but I want us to take a step deeper into our story: Our story from our

sin to His salvation. I want us to begin to think about how our story fits into God's story. This is the greatest realization that we can make in Genesis 3 this morning, to realize that you and I in this room who are following Christ, who are trusting in Christ...you and I have a story that fits into God's overall story.

This is huge. This is one of the points where we really miss it in all of our evangelistic fads in the church. There have been all kinds of different fads that I've seen. I've seen the tract era where you give out tracts, and that's how you share the gospel. The televangelist era, and you've got the bus ministry era, and you've got ministries that are designed to bring salvation to men and to women, to hurting men and to hurting women, to professionals, to the poor, to the rich. You've got all kinds of different fads that are aimed at different people, and you've got all kinds of different programs that are put out to equip us.

I'm not saying any of those things are bad in and of themselves. Please don't hear me saying any of those things are bad in and of themselves. However, I do think...well, I look over into East Asia to some of the believers that I know there. I see them leading, literally, a hundred people to Christ...small house churches leading a hundred people to Christ every month, and they haven't gotten in on the fads yet. They still don't have our programs yet. So, maybe, just maybe, apart from any fad or program or method, maybe God has already gifted every single one of us in this room who is a Christ-follower...has uniquely gifted us to share the gospel with other people. Maybe He has already given us what we need to do that. Maybe our story of how Christ has changed our lives tied in with God's story of bringing us from our sin to His salvation, maybe that's enough to lead other people to Christ.

### **Making our story personal ...**

Based on that, I want to dive into our story. How can we make our story personal? "What's your story?" That's the question I want us to begin to think about. Based on Genesis 3, what's your story? How has God brought us from our sin to His salvation?

Now, I have asked people this numerous times. It's one of my favorite questions to ask people. About our story, making it personal, I'll ask them, "What's your story?" Especially, with a Christ-follower, "What has Christ done in your life?" I have asked that question countless times, and I've heard countless stories. If I can be completely honest with you this morning, most of the time it's not very pretty. Not because people are unwilling to share their stories, but because many times...I want to be delicate here...but many times the manner in which we share our stories is appalling. I can think of numerous times where I have asked that question when, all of a sudden, a well-meaning believer, I see stumbling and bumbling down a circuitous trip that takes us down spiritual memory lane. I am sitting there thinking as I'm listening, "If I was far from God, and even had a tinge of interest in this thing called Christianity, even after hearing this story, I might recommit myself to paganism."

Some of you think that's too harsh, but I'm not going to make any apologies here. We all need to have our bells rung on this one. We need to be able in a concise, clear picture to be able to communicate what Christ has done in our lives in a way that counts for other people's lives. We need to be able to do that. If I was going to ask you right now to share with me what Christ has done in your life, could you, in less than a minute, give me a powerful picture of what Christ has done in your life? If not, why not? If we're going to be good at anything, we need to be good at saying what Christ has done in our lives in a clear, powerful way.

### **Making our story count ...**

So, let's all...all of us...pick our feelings up off the floor and let's think about how we can make our stories count. I want to give you a few things to think about to make your stories count. First of all, keep it brief. I am convinced that all of us who are Christ-followers in this room need to be able in 45 seconds to be able to share what Christ has done in our life. So that, if we were having a conversation, maybe we were sitting at Starbucks, or we're sitting at lunch or dinner, or maybe we're just walking down the hall at our office, or maybe we're walking the dog, and we see a neighbor. In just a short period of time...we can avoid being long-winded and not go into all the details, but we can just share concisely, "Here's the difference Christ has made in my life." So, keep it brief.

Second, keep it simple. I have asked this question sometimes, "What's your story?", and I have found myself immersed in about a half a dozen plot lines that have sixteen main characters, and I can't figure out who's doing what at what particular time. Keep it simple. You don't have to make this thing complex. I would encourage you to just think about three different facets, very, very simple: Simple description of who you were before you met Christ, the fact that we came into a relationship with Christ, and then a simple description of who we are after we have walked with Christ for a time. Your before and after story; very simple; 45 seconds before I met Christ, and then after. Very simple; very focused. One plot line, one major character here.

We can avoid being dramatic. In fact, I would please say to avoid the drama. Avoid the drama in your story. Now, we go to two extremes here. Some of us have such a radical story of how we came to faith in Christ that we, all of a sudden, find ourselves talking about all the drugs and all the alcohol and all the wild living and all the pagan rituals we did, that, before long, the person we are talking to is not inspired by us; they are scared by us. Or, then we go to the other side of the spectrum, and we think, "Well, I came to faith in Christ when I was five, six, or seven years old, and, unfortunately, I didn't have time to get into drugs before I came to faith in Christ, so I don't really have much to share. How am I going to put the drama in?"

I want to free you up this morning. The God of the universe becoming a man and dying a shameful death on the cross, then rising from the grave so that we can be forgiven of all our sins, that story has enough drama in it already. You don't need to add your drama. It's really only going to detract from the drama of the real story. So, keep the drama down.

Also, avoid sharing some of those weird God stories we all have. I'm guessing a lot of us have these stories, and maybe we share them sometimes and maybe we do not, but don't start off your story with, "I was sleeping one night, and I woke up in the middle of the night, and I looked up at the clock and it was 2:22, and the next night, you'll never guess what happened. I was sleeping, and I woke up and looked over at the clock, and it was 3:33. Then, the next night, I was sleeping, and I woke up and looked over at the clock and guess what it said? 4:44." You know, we've all got kind of weird stories like that of things that have happened to us, but let's not let that be the first card we play in the opportunity we have to brag about what God has done in our lives, okay? So, just avoid the drama. It's not necessary. Keep it simple.

Next, keep it focused. Don't forget: God is the hero of the story, not us. God in Christ. He is the hero. Everything hinges on Him, and they need to be able to see, not what you've done, but what Christ has done, and the difference Christ has made. Everything hinges on Christ. God is the hero of the story, not us.

Next, keep it understandable. Keep it understandable. As you think about your story, put yourself in other shoes; people that would be listening to your story. What will make sense to other people? Keep it understandable. Don't communicate like they have been in church as long as you have been in church, or they know all about the Bible like you know all about the Bible.

Keep it understandable, and it's at this point that I would encourage you to avoid "Christianese." Avoid Christianese. This is the secret language that we speak. We all know it, but nobody else knows it. Now, it's not that we throw these words out the window, that it's not important. It's very important. They are biblical words, but they don't really make sense in initial conversations with people who don't know Christ. What are some examples? Repent, accept Jesus into my heart, He is my personal Lord and Savior; Jesus died to make propitiation for my sins; I walked the aisle; I did this. Avoid our lingo that we get away with with each other, but it just doesn't make sense outside of that. You have an opportunity to share your story, the last thing you want to communicate is that you have invited the sovereign King into your soul and, by His blood, He has atoned for your sins by making propitiation between you and, Yahweh, God. That's not the picture that we want to communicate in that moment. So, avoid Christianese.

Next, keep it humble. Keep it humble. This is huge. There is no quicker way to send somebody who doesn't know Christ to the hills than to assert yourself and establish the role that you have got things figured out, and they are inferior and substandard to your way of life, and they need to get on the same page that you are on. Don't forget: You've got a story for a reason, and don't forget: We're still on a journey. All of us are still on a journey. It's okay to still be on a journey. So, keep it humble.

Finally, keep it clear. Keep it clear. I want you to think with me about the critical contrast between what happened when you became a follower of Jesus Christ. Before and after, what's the critical contrast there? What is the single greatest "So what?" about your life with Christ? Think about people in Scripture. You think about John 3 and Nicodemus. I mean, very simple, "I realized I could be born a second time, and I could start all over based on God's love for me." That's his "So what?" John 4, Samaritan woman at the well. "He told me everything I ever did, and yet, He still cares about me." You get to John 8 with the woman caught in adultery. "When everyone else wanted to condemn me, Jesus saved me, and He accepted me." You get to John 9. "I used to be blind, but now I can see, and the difference is Christ." Very simple. These great "So what?" moments in Scripture.

So, what's your "So what?" What is your picture? Some of you in this room, all your life before you met Christ, you were captured by fear. You lived in a straightjacket of fear to all the things around you. Fear of people, fear of relationships, fear of God. However, when you met Christ, He released His confidence in you in a way that you can't even explain. Some of you have experienced some major loneliness in your life, and you, whether it was because of a dysfunctional family, or because of a marriage gone wrong, you found yourself having a lot of lonely, isolated nights, but then you met Christ, and you learned that you were adopted into His family, and He loved you and accepted you for who you were, and He promised to always be with you.

Some of us are plagued with the guilt and shame of our past. We've been held captive to those things that we see in our past that kept us from moving forward. When you met Christ, you saw that He had taken care of the past. You didn't even need to remember it because He didn't remember it, and now, you have freedom to walk without that captivity.

There are all kinds of pictures here. You know what Christ has done in your life. What's your single greatest "So what?" about coming to faith in Christ?

So, here's what I want you to do. You've got a blue sheet in your celebration guide. It says at the top, "My Story." Now, what I want to do is I want to share my story with you. This is a picture of my story. I did. I grew up in an incredible Christian family. My mom and dad honored the Lord. As a result, they taught me about Christ, and I came to faith in Christ when I was about eight years old. At the same time, there was certainly an element in which I was a good kid, trying to do good things, but I want you to hear my story. If I had to sum it up, here's what it would look like.

There was a time when my life could be summed up in one word: Do. I was convinced that if I could do enough right things, I could earn favor with God. I thought that if I strived hard enough, I could be accepted by Him. However, then I was introduced to Jesus, and I discovered that Christianity is not about what I should do; it's about what Jesus had done. He'd done the striving for me and all I needed to do was accept His free gift of grace. This one truth has revolutionized my life for all of eternity. If I could be honest with you, this is still my story. I still find myself trying to do the right things, trying to measure up to the standards that are set around me, and I still find Jesus reminding me that He desires to do the work for me, if I'll let Him.

That's my story. That's the picture. Now, it's brief. I am going to challenge you to come up with your story in a hundred words or less. I did it in exactly 100 words. I hope it's simple, focused, brief, focused on that "So what?" The difference that hinges on Jesus. Jesus is the one that makes the difference in this story. I hope it sums up clearly the difference Christ has made in my life in a very simple way. So...and I'll be honest. I've shared this in different ways with many different people, but even doing this helped me to hone it down and get it down to this picture of what I would communicate if I had the opportunity.

So, here's the assignment. We are going to start with a little in class work, then it's going to carry over into the homework, okay? What you've got on this sheet are some questions to begin us thinking about each of our stories in this room. What we were like; what God used to begin to open our eyes; what I saw and understood; how Christ has changed and is affecting my life. What you've got on the front of this blue sheet is something I want to give you an opportunity, over the next couple of minutes, I want to ask Stephen to come and lead us in song, and I want to give you the opportunity just to write in some things. All these questions may pertain, or they may not pertain to you.

I want you to write in some things, and then the goal is we are working towards what's on the back. On the back, it says, "Homework for this Week." This is the homework. This week for you to write out your story in a hundred words or less. If you had an opportunity to share with someone else the difference that Christ has made in your life in a hundred words or less, what would you do? My encouragement, my challenge, is for you to do this as individuals; for parents, for you to do this with your children.

Then, you've got to turn in your homework. Online, we have a form that's set up for you to submit your story. Now, your story can be completely confidential, or there's a place where you can check that you would allow that, even without your name, to be posted in a place online or for me to use that as an example as we walk through class. That's up to you, but the challenge is for you to write out your story and be able to say in a concise way.

Now, some of you are thinking, "Why are we doing this?" We're doing this because it's worth it. It's worth it for every single one of us in this room who has been saved by Christ to be able to express that to someone else in a clear, concise and powerful way. I want to promise you...I promise you that if you are unleashed to share your story, you will see supernatural sparks fly when God begins to use that story to draw other people to Himself. Do not underestimate the power of what Christ has done in your life and in somebody else's life. We are doing this because we have people around us that we will meet and have an opportunity to be introduced to Christ through our story, and it is vitally important that we are able to share it.

So, over the next couple of minutes, you just spend some time filling in some of these blanks, and then, I will come back up and close us out.

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical. Website: [Radical.net](http://Radical.net)