



from the desk of . . .

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**#755**

**30 April 2017**

## **IT'S ALIVE!**

### **Hebrews 4:12**

It wasn't my intention to do a 3-part series, but as I was preparing today's message The Holy Spirit very clearly revealed an awesome truth to me ...

**We have a faith that's alive!**

2 weeks ago, on Resurrection Sunday, we celebrated the foundation of that. Our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ, who had suffered & died for your sins & mine, rose from the dead! And all of us, who call ourselves Christians, came together & celebrated that glorious fact. As the Apostle Paul clearly stated ... "If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is a delusion & we're still lost in our sins." (1 Corinthians 15:17) And Jesus Himself proclaimed ... "Because I live, you also will live." (John 14:19) Jesus is alive!

Last week we saw that even in those moments when we fail our Lord miserably, as Peter had done, that our faith can be resurrected as well. Our faith is alive!

This morning we're going to focus on the Bible. And we're going to see that it's not like any other book that's ever been written. It's alive ... the living Word of God!

Listen now to *Good News*, as found in the book of Hebrews, to you, who have gathered here for worship.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

**May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen**

(X) ... (youtube "*The B-I-B-L-E, yes, that's the book for me.*" ... 58 seconds)

Let me say as we begin that the B-I-B-L-E is a daunting Book. Actually, it's 66 books that were written over a period of 1,500 years by 40 different authors, who lived in 10 different countries, on 3 different continents. They worked at 20 different occupations, & wrote in 3 different languages. And when they got done & put the whole thing together it included a cast of 2,932 people by name.

But even with all that expansive variety ... there's a single storyline that ties it all together.

Now what I've done, (& I want you to take notes because this will be immensely helpful to you in your own Scripture reading), is divide the Bible into 6 parts, & each one ties into the theme of the storyline. The theme of the Bible's story is **redemption**.

What's the theme? ... (*redemption*)

Part #1 ... redemption **prompted**. And we don't have to wait very long to see it surface. Redemption makes its' 1<sup>st</sup> appearance in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the Bible.

Every good story begins with a crisis, with a conflict that has to be resolved. It's what grabs our attention & hooks us ... & Scripture is no exception.

The Bible begins with the mother of all problems.

Theologians refer to it as the **fall of humanity**.

Adam & Eve, the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 human beings are placed in a paradise called the Garden of Eden. And life is extremely good. And God promises them that it's going to stay good as long as they obey one very important command ... not to eat from the tree that gives knowledge of what is good & what is bad.

At this point, Satan, posing as a snake, comes into the picture & tempts them ... & they eat! And things immediately get bad. ... Let's stop there. I just don't get it. What's the big deal? They ate a piece of fruit.

What's so horrible about that? ...

Well, it's a big deal because Adam & Eve open up Pandora's Box. Adam & Eve introduce sin into God's world ... & with sin come devastating consequences.

Sin **destroys** what God has created.

If you have your Bible ... great, otherwise take the one from the pew rack & turn to Genesis 3, & I want to read a portion of that story, beginning at verse 8. ...

"That evening Adam & Eve heard the LORD God walking in the garden, & they hid from him among the trees. But the LORD God called out to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden; I was afraid & hid from you, because I was naked.' 'Who told you that you were naked?' God asked. 'Did you eat the fruit that I told you not to eat?' The man answered, 'The woman you put here with me gave me the fruit, & I ate it.' The LORD God asked the woman, 'Why did you do this?' She replied, 'The snake tricked me into eating it.'

Then the LORD God said to the snake, 'You will be punished for this; you alone of all the animals must bear this curse: From now on you will crawl on your belly, & you will have to eat dust as long as you live. I will make you & the woman hate each other; her offspring & yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, & you will bite her offspring's heel.'

And he said to the woman, 'I will increase your trouble in pregnancy & your pain in giving birth.'

In spite of this, you will still have desire for your husband, yet you will be subject to him.' And he said to the man, 'You listened to your wife & ate the fruit which I told you not to eat. Because of what you have done, the ground will be under a curse. You will have to work hard all your life to make it produce enough food for you. It will produce weeds & thorns, & you will have to eat wild plants. You will have to work hard & sweat to make the soil produce anything.'" (Genesis 3:8-19)

So this has become a horrible situation. It begins with Adam & Eve hiding from God ... the God that they had been so intimate with. Sin brings **alienation** from God. Another consequence ... they start blaming each other. Sin brings **conflict** in relationships ... always.

Every conflict we have in any relationship in our lives can always be traced back to some sin ... anger, pride, jealousy, selfishness. So we have alienation from God, we have conflict in relationships, we have the advent of an evil adversary ...

& Satan now has gained a foothold in God's world.

And with all this comes another consequence that God never intended ... physical & emotional pain.

Eve's going to have pain in childbirth. She's going to love her husband, but he's going to become chauvinistic, & try to rule over her.

And even nature becomes contaminated. There's going to be weeds & thorns, which will lead to diseases & natural disasters ... all a result of sin. And then the list wraps up with death; people are going to die ...

all because Adam & Eve introduced sin into the world.

Our daughter Kelly is one of the most positive people you'll ever meet. No matter what's happening in her life, "Hey, Kelly, how's it going?" Her reply ... "It's all good!"

Well, read *Genesis* 3 to 11 ... it's all bad. ... Now the good thing about it being all bad is that our loving Heavenly Father decides to intervene.

God could have turned His back on His creation at this point. Instead He devises a rescue plan by which He's going to redeem, not just fallen humanity, but everything He has created. Look at *Genesis* 3:15. God is in the middle of lowering the boom & He addresses Satan. "You will bite her offspring's heel, but the woman's offspring will crush your head."

Let me explain what that means. God is telling Satan, "one day an offspring of the woman, Jesus, is going to totally destroy you. Now in the process you're going to severely wound Him ...

but ultimately He's going to put an end to you."

This is a picture of Jesus' death on the cross. When Jesus dies on the **cross** He pays the **penalty** for our **sin**.

He'll be "wounded" ... but our adversary's blow to the head will be fatal. And the important thing that I want you to understand is that God's ultimate redemption is already being shown in the earliest parts of the Bible.

Okay, let's move to part #2 ... redemption **prepared**. God plans to send the world a Redeemer. So, how does God plan to do this? He does it by preparing a group of people that are going to be "set apart" ... who will become the ancestors through whom this coming Redeemer will one day arrive.

Let's go to Genesis 12. Here's a conversation that God has with a man named Abram.

(This takes place around 2,000 B.C.)

"The LORD said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your relatives, & your father's home, & go to a land that I am going to show you. I will give you many descendants, & they will become a great nation. I will bless you & make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse those who curse you. And through you I will bless all the nations.'"

(Genesis 12:1-3)

God's promise to Abram has 3 sections to it. The 1<sup>st</sup> deals with a people, the 2<sup>nd</sup> a place, & the 3<sup>rd</sup> a purpose.

"I will give you many descendants,  
& they will become a great nation."

Now when this promise was made to Abram he was 75 years old ... & didn't have any kids. In fact, it'll be another 25 years before his son is born, whom he names Isaac, which means "laughter". (I think even God was laughing at this.) This 100-year-old man is given a son, at which point God changes his name to Abraham, which means "father of many." And one of Abraham's future descendants will be Jesus. (In fact, at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel there's a genealogy ... "This is the list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, who was a descendant of Abraham.") (Matthew 1:1)

Now the rest of Genesis deals with Abraham, his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, & his great-grandson Joseph. Joseph has 11 brothers, & they become the 12 tribes of Israel ... through whom the Redeemer is going to come.

So God is setting apart a group of people. And because they've been "set apart" God wants to make sure they behave as they should. That's what the word "holy" means in the Bible ... "set apart." And since God wants His people to be holy, He gives them a # of rules & commands to live by. Go back to the Table Of Contents.

The 1<sup>st</sup> 5 books ... Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, & Deuteronomy ... tell God's people how to behave.

And then God promised Abraham a place ...  
 "Go to a land that I am going to show you."

So Abraham goes to the land of Canaan, which eventually becomes known as the Promised Land. However, years after he moved there there's a terrible famine & his descendants relocate to where there's food ... Egypt. And things are good for a while. But then a new Pharaoh comes to power who didn't appreciate all those foreigners living in Egypt, & so he enslaved them ... for 430 years until a redeemer came along named Moses.

Moses "redeems" God's people from slavery in Egypt, & takes them to the very border of the Promised Land. (This is a preview of coming attractions because God's plan is not just to redeem His people from slavery in Egypt, but to someday to redeem all people from our slavery to sin in a fallen world.)

But there's a 3<sup>rd</sup> part to God's promise which has to do with the people's purpose. The Hebrews have not been set apart & given a place of their own just so they can enjoy an exclusive relationship with God.

Back to 12:3 ...

"Through you I will bless all the nations."

... Okay, how's God going to do that? ... By being part of the family tree of the Redeemer. One day the Redeemer of the world will come through Abraham's descendants.

But there's a 2<sup>nd</sup> way in which God intends for the Hebrews to be a blessing to all the nations.

God wants His relationship with them to look so inviting that all the people on the planet will say ...

"We want the one true living God to be our God too!

We want your God to be our God."

This is the mission that God gives to His people.

So, how'd they do? ... Not too great. Back to the Table Of Contents ... Joshua down to Esther ... "books of history." We had 5 books of the law, now there are a dozen books of history. This is the history of God's people from the time they entered the Promised Land.

Let me recap it for you.

Right after Moses' successor, Joshua, passes from the scene, the next book is called Judges, & that's because the new Hebrew leaders are Judges. Now don't think Judge Judy with a black robe sitting behind a big desk. These Judges were governmental leaders. And following the Judges come Kings. Most of us are familiar with the 1<sup>st</sup> 3 kings ... Saul, David, & Solomon. They began their reign about 1,000 B.C.

(Abraham about 2,000 B.C. ... David about 1,000 B.C.)

This becomes Israel's golden era.

It's during this time period that the books of wisdom/poetry are written. Back to the Table of Contents ... Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Songs ... are called the books of wisdom/poetry.

Solomon had a son named Rehoboam, & he does some really stupid things when he becomes king, & as a result there's a mutiny in his kingdom. (X) The 10 tribes in the north decide to break off & start a country of their own. They name their country Israel, & the capital city is Samaria. Meanwhile, the 2 remaining tribes in the south, name their country Judah, & their capital is Jerusalem.

Now here's everything you need to know from this point on. In the north they have one bad king after another. Their spiritual life just goes into the toilet. And finally God has had enough & allows the superpower of the day, the Assyrians, to come & destroy the 10 northern tribes. Some are taken into captivity; others just disappear. This happens around 722 B.C.

The 2 tribes in the south fare a little better. They last an additional 150 years, because they occasionally have a good king, who points people back toward God. But it never lasts for long. So, in 587 B.C. God has had enough of the southern kingdom as well, & He sends the current superpower, Babylon, to destroy Judah & take many of its' people into captivity.

They remain in exile for 70 years, at which time they return to their homeland, & rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, & the Temple. And this is where the books of history conclude. God has a plan for redemption.

But even though God's people fail at their part of the bargain, the Lord still has an ace up His sleeve. He still plans to send a Redeemer through Abraham's line. This will be announced through some spokesmen called Prophets, which brings us to part #3 ...

redemption **prophesied**.

Back to the Table Of Contents. After the books of wisdom/poetry come the books of prophecy, which run to the end of the O.T. The books of prophecy break down into 2 groups: the Major Prophets & the Minor Prophets. There are 4 Major Prophets ... Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, & Daniel. (The book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah.) And after the 4 Major Prophets there are a dozen Minor Prophets from Hosea to Malachi.

So, what's the difference between a Major Prophet & a Minor Prophet? ... Real simply ... the Major Prophets are called Major Prophets because their books are longer.

Now, don't assume that these prophetic books are dealing entirely with future events. The majority of the material found in them addresses the present wickedness of God's people ...

"It's time to repent & come back to God."

But, there are specific predictions about a coming Redeemer. Let me share a couple from Isaiah ...

"A child is born to us! A son is given to us! And he will be our ruler. He will be called, 'Wonderful Counselor,' 'Mighty God,' 'Eternal Father,' 'Prince of Peace.'" (Isaiah 9:6)

That was written 800 years before Jesus was born.

And then on the flipside ...

"But because of our sins he was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment he suffered, made whole by the blows he received. All of us were like sheep that were lost, each of us going his own way. But the LORD made the punishment fall on him, the punishment all of us deserved." (Isaiah 53:5-6)

The prophet Micah predicted that the little town of Bethlehem would see a Redeemer born right there. The prophet Daniel tells us the exact time that it's going to take place. Zachariah predicts that one day this Redeemer will ride triumphantly into Jerusalem on the back of a colt, but later be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Isaiah writes that this Redeemer will be executed alongside of criminals,  
& yet buried in a rich man's tomb.

Then, after 400 years of silence from God ... the Redeemer shows up. Jesus arrives on the scene, which brings us to part #4 ... redemption **purchased**. We're finally in the N.T. & I'm going to go through this quickly because I know you're more familiar with this.

The N.T. begins with 4 Gospels ... Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John. These are biographies of Jesus.

The Gospels focus much of their material on God's plan of redemption ... Jesus' death on the cross. Now that doesn't mean that the rest of His life wasn't important; obviously what He taught is very valuable. But the Bible focuses on His death. Even what it says about His life gives evidence as to why His death on the cross is so effective in purchasing our redemption.

Let me illustrate what I mean. We read in the Gospels that Jesus was born of a virgin. That's pretty spectacular. He's conceived by The Holy Spirit. We read of numerous miracles that He does. All of this points to His Godness. Jesus had to be **God** in order for His death on the cross to be of infinite **worth** in paying the **penalty** for our sins. How else could the death of one man cover everyone in history who wants forgiveness ... unless that one man is the infinite God Himself?

Now not only do the Gospels point to Jesus' deity ... they also show Him to be a man.

And, Jesus had to be **human** ... otherwise He couldn't serve as a **representative** for fellow humans when He **dies** on the **cross**. In order to pay the penalty for our sins ... He had to be one of us.

So Jesus is the one & only God/man.

Uniquely in history there was no one else like Jesus ... infinite God, able to pay a penalty, by a death that is of infinite worth. And yet, one who is a man acting as humanity's representative. Wow!

This is redemption purchased.

Now what happens to those who put their trust in Him & are redeemed? That brings us to part #5 ...  
redemption **proclaimed**.

Back to the Table Of Contents ... the next book is The Acts. The Acts is the history of the early Church, those 1<sup>st</sup> believers who are redeemed by Jesus.

This is the N.T.'s only book of history.

It's followed by 21 letters, or epistles. From Romans all the way down to Jude ... these are all epistles; 21 letters that describe what happened to these people who put their trust in Christ. They proclaim the Good News. And as we read this we discover that this proclaiming is done in 2 ways ... through words & through actions.

Let me be real direct here. Are you doing that? ... Are you telling people what Jesus has done for you? ... If you are, that opens the opportunity to invite people to come to C.C.R.M. & Kingdom Life. This is what we do with our mouths. But we also proclaim Jesus, through our actions. And that's illustrated in The Acts.

While the letters reiterate the teachings of Jesus.

They tell how we ought to behave: how to behave with one another ... how to behave with our enemies ... how to behave in our families. We ought to be giving generously to the Lord's work so the Good News will spread. We should be righting injustices. We tell the story with our **words**, we tell it with our **actions**.

If you're a follower of Jesus you will be proclaiming the fact that He has brought a change into your life ... both through your words & your behavior.

And that brings us to the closing part in this story ... redemption **perfected**. And there's only one book left ... The Revelation. Bible scholars refer to it as an apocalypse. This kind of writing uses symbolic imagery to describe how history will end & how eternity will begin.

Let me quickly recap The Revelation for you. Things are going to get very, very bad on earth. There's going to be a tribulation. But it'll end with the return of Jesus, & the Final Judgment. All the living & all the dead will come before Jesus' judgment seat to give an account of their lives. And those who rejected His offer of redemption in this life will be sentenced to Hell.

On the other hand, those who have embraced Jesus' offer of redemption ... & the evidence of that again is that their words & their lives show that they've been redeemed ... are welcomed into God's eternal Kingdom.

"Then I saw a new heaven & a new earth. The 1<sup>st</sup> heaven & 1<sup>st</sup> earth disappeared, & the sea vanished. ... I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: 'Now God's home is with people! He will live with them, & they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, & he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.'" (The Revelation 21:1,3-4)

Doesn't that sound good? ... Doesn't that sound like something you want to be part of? ...

I want to close by asking a very important question. Where are you in the story? ... We've covered a lot of ground today ... the whole story of the Bible. I wanted you to understand the incredible great lengths to which our God has gone to redeem us from sin & to make us His own. God put a plan into place that began all the way back in the Garden of Eden, & that culminated with the death of His Son on the cross ... so that He could undo the consequences of sin, not only in your life, but in all of creation, so that one day we could enjoy a new heaven & a new earth in His presence.

So, what have you done with His offer of redemption? ... We're not talking about religion here ... do you have a personal relationship with our Redeemer?

**MARANA THA**