

RAISED TO LIFE

A STUDY OF SALVATION

Week 2 – Why Jesus?

Week 2, Day 1: The Fall – Separation from God

Genesis 3:8-13

⁸ They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

Understanding the Passage:

It's hard to believe this all comes down to a bite from a piece of fruit! Of course, it is not. "The Fall" is not first breaking a rule, but rather it is about a break in relationship. The story portrays the moment trust frays, intimacy gives way to fear, and we begin to pull away from God, from one another, and even from ourselves.

At its heart, the story is about broken trust. Humanity chooses autonomy over dependence, deciding that life might be safer or more fulfilling if we define good and evil on our own terms. The consequence is not immediate destruction, but rather shame creeps in. We hide. We blame one another, and distance grows.

What is striking in this story is not only what we do, but what God does. God comes walking in the garden, not in anger, but in search. "Where are you?" is not a question asked for information; it is an invitation back into relationship. Even after trust is broken, God still seeks. We are not abandoned, but we are no longer at ease with God.

While exile from the garden is often read solely as punishment, it is also a form of mercy. A boundary is set so that brokenness does not become eternal. While life outside the garden is harder, it is also a life in which God continues to accompany humanity. God's grace is at work, even here.

And to this day, we still tend to hide when we feel exposed. We often shift blame when relationships fracture. We also struggle between trusting God and trusting ourselves alone. Thankfully, the God who seeks in the garden continues to seek us now, meeting us not in perfection, but where and who we are.

So, if the deepest problem is a break in relationship, we need more than rule-following or self-improvement. We need reconciliation and restoration in our relationship with God.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What does it say about God that God goes looking for Adam and Eve?
2. Does this challenge the idea that sin is just “breaking rules”?
3. Does separation (not punishment) help explain why restoration is needed?
4. When have you been tempted to choose autonomy over trust? What was at stake for you?
5. Where do you notice shame, hiding, or distance in your own relationship with God?

Week 2, Day 2: The Human Condition – Unable to Save Ourselves

Jeremiah 17:9

*⁹ The heart is devious above all else;
it is perverse—
who can understand it?.*

Isaiah 59:4,9-15

*⁴ No one brings suit justly;
no one goes to law honestly;
they rely on empty pleas; they speak lies,
conceiving mischief and bearing iniquity.*

*⁹ Therefore justice is far from us,
and deliverance does not reach us;
we wait for light, but there is only darkness;
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.*

*¹⁰ We grope like the blind along a wall,
groping like those who have no eyes;
we stumble at noon as in the twilight,
among the vigorous as though we were dead.*

*¹¹ We all growl like bears;
like doves we moan mournfully.
We wait for justice, but there is none;
for salvation, but it is far from us.*

*¹² For our transgressions before you are many,
and our sins testify against us.*

*Our transgressions indeed are with us,
and we know our iniquities:*

*¹³ transgressing and denying the Lord
and turning away from following our God,
talking oppression and revolt,
conceiving lying words and uttering them from the heart.*

*¹⁴ Justice is turned back,
and deliverance stands at a distance,
for truth stumbles in the public square,
and uprightness cannot enter.*

*15 Truth is lacking,
and whoever turns from evil is despoiled.
The Lord saw it, and it displeased him
that there was no justice.*

Understanding the Passage:

From the perspective of seeing The Fall as a rupture in relationship with God, now we turn towards our condition and humans. The prophets had a way of pointing out our human condition from time to time. The prophets were careful observers of real people, real communities, and real suffering. They named the uncomfortable and 'said the quiet thing out loud.' Something is off at the center of us. Something much deeper than bad habits or poor choices.

Jeremiah speaks of the human heart as unreliable and easily self-deceived. This is not an insult, but rather an honest observation. Yes, we can mean well and still cause harm. We can convince ourselves that we are right, just, or faithful, while slowly drifting away from what gives us life. The problem is not simply that we sometimes do bad things, it is that we often misjudge our motives when we do things.

Isaiah widens the lens, looking at society itself. He describes communities where injustice becomes normal, where truth grows quiet, and where people learn to live with moral confusion because speaking up feels costly or futile. From this perspective, sin is not only personal, it is also cultural. It shapes systems, habits, and assumptions that begin to feel inevitable. We stumble not because God is absent, but because we no longer know how to walk straight together.

We may not be as bad as we could be, but we certainly are not as wholesome as we often think we are. Our inability to save ourselves is not the end of the story. While we are deeply broken, we are more deeply loved.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Do these prophetic descriptions resonate with what we see in today's world?
2. Why do you think we struggle to see our own brokenness?
3. Where do you see the human condition affecting even "good" people?
4. What feels hardest for you to trust God with: your failures, your blind spots, or your future?
5. Where do you notice gaps between good intentions and lived reality?

Week 2, Day 3: Individual Sin

Romans 3:9-26

9 What then? Are we any better off? No, not at all, for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, 10 as it is written:

*"There is no one who is righteous, not even one;
11 there is no one who has understanding;
there is no one who seeks God.
12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
there is no one who shows kindness;
there is not even one."*

*13 "Their throats are opened graves;
they use their tongues to deceive."
"The venom of vipers is under their lips."
14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."
15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

¹⁶ ruin and misery are in their paths,
¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known."
¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

¹⁹ Now we know that, whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For no human will be justified before him by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

²¹ But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets, ²² the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ it was to demonstrate at the present time his own righteousness, so that he is righteous and he justifies the one who has the faith of Jesus.

Understanding the Passage:

When I hear the word sin, I often think of street-corner preachers with bullhorns, casting judgment on strangers and declaring who is condemned. What do they know about me? Who are they to decide that I'm evil? For a long time, that imagery caused me to tune out any talk of sin or evil altogether.

But when I came to understand The Fall not as rule-breaking, but as separation in relationship with God, something shifted. And when I began to understand sin as whatever hinders the restoration of that relationship, the word became far less offensive, and much more honest.

After naming the rupture of The Fall and the depth of the human condition, we turn to our individual sin. It is not about blame, but rather to understand and accept our part in the brokenness in this world.

In Romans 3, Paul refuses to let anyone stand above the rest. All fall short. There is no sliding scale where some of us are 'mostly fine' and others beyond repair. Sin is not a list of bad actions; it is a shared condition that shows up uniquely in each of our lives. We are responsible for our sin, those things we do and don't do that get in the way of our relationship with God. When we deny our responsibility, we excuse harm and avoid the work of restored relationship with God.

Our individual sin often looks less dramatic than we expect. It shows up in small choices to protect ourselves at the expense of others. When fear shapes our honesty, when resentment hardens into distance, when self-interest quietly overrides love. These moments matter not because God is eager to condemn, but because they reveal our deep need for forgiveness and liberation.

I find Paul's insistence that none of us are justified by achievement to be deeply freeing. We do not earn our way back to God through effort or discipline. Being set right in relationship with God is a gift, freely given through grace. It is not a reward. That does not excuse sin, but it lets us know that it is not solely up to us. Salvation does not begin with our success; it begins with God's grace and faithfulness. God does not wait for our perfection before drawing near. Forgiveness restores relationship, and liberates us to live differently.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Have comparison or “spiritual ranking” distorted your view of yourself or others? How?
2. What makes it difficult to admit personal sin in high-functioning cultures?
3. What does it feel like to hear that justification is a gift rather than an achievement?
4. How might grace invite you not just to feel better, but to live more freely?
5. Where might forgiveness, rather than self-improvement, be the deeper need in your life right now?

Week 2, Day 4: Powers & Principalities

Ephesians 6:10-12

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; ¹¹put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, ¹²for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Colossians 1:13-14

¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Understanding the Passage:

Powers and principalities. Evil. Demons. Darkness. Once again, words I find hard to digest until I better understand the context. After looking at our individual sin, we look at those forces around us that shape our lives in ways we do not fully control or even always notice.

Sin is more than individual ‘wrongdoing’. It can take on a life of its own through systems, cultures, and patterns that reinforce fear, injustice, and division. We are shaped by stories we did not write, assumptions we did not choose, and pressures we did not create. Yet each of these still influence how we see, act, and love.

Again, I find this liberating. We remain responsible for our choices, but we are not naïve about the forces at work around us. Economic systems can reward greed. Cultural narratives can normalize exclusion. Fear can become policy. Silence can become complicity. Over time, these forces form habits of heart and life that feel inevitable, when they are not.

Naming these can protect us from misplaced guilt. Not every burden we carry is self-inflicted. Some wounds are inherited. Some patterns were handed to us long before we had language for them.

This is where the promise of liberation matters. In Colossians, Paul speaks about being transferred out from under domination into a different kind of reign. Christ does not merely forgive individual guilt; Christ confronts and overcomes the forces that enslave us. This is where we see salvation not only about being pardoned, but also about being freed.

Again, these outside forces all too often appear ordinary. They show up in relentless pressure to produce, in social divisions we no longer question, in fear-based news cycles that shape how we see one another. They thrive when people feel isolated, powerless, or resigned. And yet, the good news is that these forces are not ultimate.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What forces (cultural, systemic, or spiritual) do you notice shaping your choices or fears?
2. In what ways do you see powers and principalities affecting relationships in your community or society?
3. Can you think of any guilt or burdens you may be carrying that may not be yours alone?
4. How does it change your understanding of salvation to include liberation, not just forgiveness?
5. Where might Christ be inviting you into greater freedom rather than greater effort?

Week 2, Day 5: Why Do We Need Jesus?

Romans 5:8

⁸Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, that proves God's love toward us.

2 Corinthians 5:19

¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Understanding the Passage:

Hopefully the question “Why Jesus?” is less abstract today than it was at the beginning of the week. We identified separation, the limits of the human heart, the reality of our individual sin, and the power of forces larger than us. All of these point us to the truth that we cannot do this on our own. And, thankfully we are not left alone.

We need Jesus not because God is distant, but because God has chosen to come near. The heart of the gospel is not humanity reaching up to God, but God reaching toward us, even though we are still fractured, confused, and resistant. God’s grace and love come first. And God offers us relationship and healing before is returned.

In Jesus, this love is not sentimental or abstract. It shows up in touch, in shared meals, in truth spoken with compassion. Jesus embodies God’s healing by restoring dignity, confronting injustice, and drawing us back into community. God’s goal is not condemnation, but reconciliation.

Paul speaks of God actively restoring relationship with the world, refusing to keep score. This does not mean that harm is ignored or that accountability disappears. It means that forgiveness is the beginning of transformation. Over time, God’s grace reshapes desire, heals what is bent, and restores us into love for God and love for neighbor.

Many of us carry a quiet assumption that we must fix ourselves before God will receive us. But God’s love meets us as we are and refuses to leave us, even when we turn away.

We’ve seen that we need reconciliation, healing, and liberation. We cannot do this on our own, so Jesus does for us, what we cannot do for ourselves. He restores relationship, invites us into a new way of living marked by grace, and frees us from domination.

The invitation is simple, but not easy. Trust that God has already moved toward us. Receive love we did not earn. And allow that love to change us.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. How would you answer, "Why do we need Jesus?" in one sentence?
2. Is there a part of salvation you personally resonate with most (forgiveness, healing, or transformation)? Why?
3. Why is grace hard for self-reliant people to receive?
4. What does restored relationship with God look like in your everyday life?
5. In what ways might Jesus be inviting you into deeper healing, not just relief from guilt?

Video Questions:

1. The video frames the Fall as a rupture in relationship rather than simply "breaking a rule." How does that shift change the way you think about sin, shame, and the need for salvation?
2. The video names self-reliance and autonomy as central themes in the Fall story. Where do you see self-reliance celebrated in our culture, and how might it subtly distance people from God or from one another?
3. **The prophets describe the human heart as deceptive (not malicious, but unreliable).** **Why do you** think it is so hard for people, especially "good" or high-functioning people, to acknowledge blind spots or brokenness?
4. The video suggests that our problems are both personal and systemic. Can you think of examples where good intentions still lead to harmful outcomes because of the systems or cultures we participate in?
5. The video presents sin as "whatever points us away from God or harms relationship with God." How does that definition compare with how you learned about sin growing up, or how you think about it now?
6. Paul's insistence that "all have fallen short" removes spiritual ranking. In what ways does comparison (morally, spiritually, or socially) still shape how people see themselves or others?
7. The conversation around powers and principalities reframes evil as forces like fear, status, nationalism, consumerism, or productivity. Which of these feels most present or powerful in your own life or community?
8. The video emphasizes that we need both forgiveness *and* liberation. Why do you think Christians sometimes emphasize one while neglecting the other?
9. Grace is described as something given before we fix ourselves. Why is receiving grace often harder for self-sufficient or achievement-oriented people?
10. Jesus is presented as the one who restores relationship, heals brokenness, and frees us from domination. If someone asked you, "Why do you think Jesus matters?", how do you think you'd respond?

Prayer requests and other notes: