

Series: What's So Great About the Gospel?
Philippians 3:20-21

September 6, 2009

“The Great Invitation: Two Trees, Some Fruit, and a Piece of Bread”

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Alright! What's going on, eleven o'clock service? Welcome to worship! Praise the Lord! Amen! We're going to do something a little bit different today if that's okay with you. We have this *big* screen that is going to provide the notes as I preach my sermon. The man behind the screen is Chris. Chris, say hi. There you go. So, they saw how technologically inept I was, so they brought Chris in. So Chris is going to be helping you out. Let's give a hand to Chris. Thank you, Chris.

So if you can see the screen, you're in good shape. If you can't see the screen, you can kind of re-position yourself to see the screen. No one is moving, so I guess you guys can all see the screen. Awesome! Let's get started.

We've been in a series where we've been asking the question...*What's so great about the gospel?* We've been looking at the answer through the lens of a small book in the New Testament written by the great Apostle Paul called Philippians. You guys are so sharp, man! Alright, so this week we're looking at the great invitation. What's the greatness the gospel is inviting us to? In the third chapter of the book of Philippians in verses 20 and 21, Paul hints at the answer. So I'm going to read it, and you can follow along with me.

Paul says, *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!"*

Now what's the great invitation Paul is hinting at here? If you didn't pick it up, it's okay. I'll unpack it for you. But let me warn you up front, I'm going to move. Because there is a lot to cover, and I only have 30 minutes to preach this sermon. You know what I'm saying? We're not in a Korean church. Back in the motherland, they use to give me like two, three hours to do my thing. I only get 30 minutes here.

So, in 30 minutes, we will arrive at the answer hopefully. We will arrive at the answer in three movements in three chapters: chapter 1, brokenness; chapter 2, hope and healing; and chapter 3, redemption. We're going to answer the question...*What's so great about the gospel? What's the greatness that the gospel is inviting us to?* We're going to answer that question by looking at two trees, some fruit, and a piece of bread. Are you guys ready? Alright. Let's do it.

Chapter 1...brokenness. Paul says in Philippians 3:20 that we are eagerly awaiting a Savior. He repeats this language in Romans 8, saying creation is eagerly awaiting. He calls this waiting *groaning*. The question is, why are we groaning, and what are we groaning for? We find answers to these questions all

the way back in Genesis. "In the beginning..." Of course, I'm going to go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible. By the time I finish, I'll end up at the end of the Bible, and hopefully we'll get you guys out of here by tomorrow. Alright?

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void." Tohuw waabohuw...wild and waste. "And darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Already in verse 2, we see God has some sort of Spirit. Awesome...it's up there! Because at eight o'clock it didn't go up. "And God spoke and said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day' and the darkness 'night'. It was evening, and it was morning – the first day.

God said, 'Let there be an expanse to separate the waters above from the waters below.'" God makes this expanse...calls it sky. It separates the waters above from the waters below. "It was evening, and it was morning – the second day.

God said, 'Let all the waters be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' These gathered waters God called seas, and the dry ground God called land. And it was evening, and it was morning – the third day."

"And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to light the earth and to serve as signs to mark the days and the years and the seasons.' God made the greater light to govern the day, the lesser light to govern the night, and God made stars" ...because He is a romantic. "And God saw it was good. And it was evening, and it was morning – the fourth day.

And God said, 'Let the waters fill with teeming creatures, and let them reproduce according to their kind.'" Let them get their groove on. "And let the skies be filled with winged creatures, and let them reproduce according to their kind.' And it was evening, and it was morning – the fifth day." Birds and fish getting funky.

"And God said, 'Let there be animals. Let there be livestock. Let there be creeping things. Let there be crawling things.'" Let there be small dogs whose owners dress them up at Christmastime. God said, "It's kind of weird...but nevertheless, it's good." "It was evening, and it was morning – the sixth day.

Then God saw everything that He had made, and God rested."

Now, brace yourselves for a profound thought. Birds go in the sky, and fish go in the water. Thank you; thank you. I'm going to be here all week. Just kidding... Sun, moon, stars, they go into space and they correspond with the lights. Animals and humans, they go into land and sea. As Bruce Waltke points out in his fabulous commentary on Genesis, the things in day four fill in day one, the things in day five correspond to day two, and the things in day six relate to day three. In fact, the first three days, the primary work of God is to separate, and in the second three days, God fills what has previously been separated.

Now, it's interesting to see how God does this creative work. God speaks, and it was so. It's His word that does the work of creation. It's His word that brings order out of disorder. It's His word that brings light from darkness. It's His word that brings fullness from emptiness. It's His word that brings beauty out of chaos. God has this word that creates and orders and fills and forms and beautifies.

The rest of Genesis 1 and 2 describe this perfection...this paradise of creation. *"God saw everything He had made, and behold, it was very good."* The metaphor that God uses to describe this paradise is a garden. God plants this garden. He places man and woman in the middle of it, and He charges them to be stewards over all creation.

Here was perfection. Here was paradise. Here God's presence was so unhindered. It was so unfiltered that the language is highly anthropomorphic. It's human-like. God walks, and He talks with Adam and Eve. Here there was no death. Here there was no disease. Here there was no hatred. There was *shalom*, which the Bible translates as peace. But peace is such a weak word for shalom. Because shalom is bigger than that; it's deeper than that; it's so much richer than that. Shalom means this togetherness...this integrity of being...this harmony where all things are as they ought to be.

There was shalom with God. There was shalom with self. There was shalom with one another, and there was shalom with creation. In the garden, God placed a tree...the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God tells Adam, "Do not eat of this tree...this Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. For on the day you eat of it, you will surely die."

Now we don't know how long it takes place chronologically, but by Genesis, chapter 3...the very next chapter...things unravel very fast. In Genesis 3, we see the fall. Within the story itself...within the narrative structure itself...you see the definition, the essence, and the effect of sin. God commands them about a tree. Scholars have always asked, "Why a tree?" Why not say to Adam and Eve, "Adam and Eve, don't kill. Don't steal. Don't commit adultery (though that would be hard because there were no other people)." Because these are all moral statutes. They make sense. Why does God give them an amoral command?

Commentators say it's because God is saying to them, "Adam and Eve, obey Me not because it makes sense to you. Obey Me not because it's useful to you. Obey Me simply because I am God, and you are not. If you live as if I am God and you are not, there will be peace with Me, there will be peace with you, there will be peace with one another, and there will be peace with creation."

Now, I want you to notice a narrative order here, okay? There is God, and God commands man about a tree. Alright? Man tells woman because Eve is not on the scene yet. Together they are stewards over creation. But what happens in the fall? Well, creation comes, the serpent tempts woman, the woman tempts man, and together they rebel against God. There is this massive inversion here. There is this massive inversion, and this...*this* is the quintessential definition of sin.

Barbara Brown Taylor, who is a professor at Columbia University of Spirituality says this, "The essence of sin is not primarily the violation of laws, but it is a wrecked relationship with God." In other words, the essence of sin is not so much a broken rule as it is this inverted relationship where man takes the place of God.

If you think about it, I mean, what really is addiction? Is it not looking to creation to give to you what only God can give to you? Right? So because of this inversion where there was life, there is now death. Where there was health, there is now disease. Where there was harmony, there is now brokenness. Whereas before there was shalom with God.

In Genesis 3:8, we find some of the saddest words found in the Bible. *"Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid."* You see the word for

walk...*halak*...is more than just getting from A to B. It carries overtones of relationship, of friendship, of communion. Whereas before there was this friendship with God, here, Adam and Eve hear God pursuing relationship with them, and they hide, and there is brokenness with God and alienation.

In Genesis 3:7 it says, "They were naked, and they were ashamed." Whereas before there was this harmony with self. They were naked and *unashamed*. It's this word that conveys this transparency, this comfort in one's own skin. In Genesis 3:7 it says, "They were naked, and they were ashamed." There is brokenness with self and nakedness and shame.

In Genesis 3:12 when God confronts Adam, Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. There is brokenness with one another, brokenness with community and blame and accusation. Whereas before there was shalom with creation, in Genesis 3:18, we see the curse of man's labor as he works the ground. There is brokenness with creation signified by thorns.

Ladies and gentlemen, we live in a broken world. I don't think I have to try too hard to convince everybody of this truth. You just open up your web browser one day...you just open up your newspaper one day...and you're going to read stories of suicide bombings, of war, of poverty, of disease. Maybe some of us are unaware of this. Then, as Christians, it has to be our heart to say, "God, I repent. Open my eyes and open my ears, and break my heart for the things that break Your heart."

Just this past week, I was preparing this message. I was driving to my office, and I get this phone call from one of my small group members. Her name is Alyse, and she just gave birth to a lovely young daughter. "Hey Alyse, and welcome young Scarlett!" Alyse calls me on the phone, and she says, "There is a situation here. Can you come over?"

So, I come over, and she is sitting with a family who had been living in their car because they're homeless. We just sat with them and, you know, we gave them a meal, and we prayed for them. Alyse sat there, and she let their 7-year-old daughter just weep in her arms.

My heart just broke because I just thought to myself, *How does this happen? How does this happen? How do kids go hungry, and how do families not have shelter in a world...in an area...filled with extraordinary wealth? How does this happen?* There is something fundamentally wrong with our world. It is broken. It's broken, and we long for things to be set right. There is brokenness, but...there is also hope and healing.

Chapter 2...hope and healing. In Philippians 3:20, Paul says we are eagerly awaiting. We are groaning. For what? For time to heal all hurts? For scientific progress and technological advance to usher us into a new utopia? Because if what human beings need above all else is better health, then may God give us doctors. If what human beings need above all else is economic justice, then may God give us economists.

If what human beings need above all else is better technology, then may God give us engineers. If what human beings need above all else is better government, then may God give us politicians. But if what human beings need above all else is healing from sin...if we need reconciliation with the God who made us...then God give us a Savior.

Paul says we are eagerly awaiting a Savior...a Savior with power. Well, what sort of power does this Savior have? The gospel of John starts off, *"In the beginning..."* Immediately, his hearers would have harkened back to Genesis. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing*

was made that has been made." Do you hear the language of creation here? *"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men."* John is just pulling terminology out of Genesis. Then John says, *"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us."*

This Word who was there at the beginning of time...this Word who created all things...this Word who brought order out of disorder...this Word who brought beauty out of chaos...became flesh. He became a living human being. He goes to work, and He has power. But not just any power...a very specific power.

Scholars have always found this intriguing. When you look at the miracles of Jesus, they weren't just raw displays of power to show off how great He was. He didn't do His miracles to say, "Hey, look at Me! Look how awesome I am! Believe in Me!" Right? If that wasn't the main reason why He did His miracles, why did He do the stuff He did? He fed people bread; He healed a leper. I mean, this is nice, but this isn't the way to wow people.

Obviously, Jesus did not have a marketing degree, nor did He have a marketing department. Because if He had a marketing department, I guarantee you they would have told Him this. They would have said, "Jesus, listen to us because we know. We know what the people want. Alright? Here is what You want to do if You want to flex Your God muscles a little bit, and You want to show off Your God power. Here is what You should do..."

We want You to stand on the Sea of Galilee, and then we want You to fly in the air and do some moves and then land. That's going to be phat! That's going to be awesome. Then after You land, what we want You to do is we want You to write Your name in the sky with fire. I mean, if You wanted to get across Your power, there are better ways to do it, right?"

But Jesus never does that stuff. *Never*. Why not? Because His miracles weren't just raw displays of power. They were pointing to something. They were pointing to hope and healing. You see, people often think of Jesus' miracles as spectacles...as special effects back in the day...as suspensions of the natural order. That's why we can't believe them, right? Because they're aberrations. They're unnatural. Yet, we long for Jesus' miracles. We long for them. Why?

Listen to the profound words of German theologian Jürgen Moltmann as he says this, "Jesus' healings are the only natural things in a world that is unnatural, demonized, and wounded." Do you know what Jürgen Moltmann is saying? He is saying, "Look at the miracles of Jesus. What does He do? How does He use His power?"

Well, He heals a blind young man, and He helps him to see. He takes an outcast leper, and He makes him clean by touching him. That's a whole other sermon altogether. He restores a sick woman's bleeding body, and He makes her well. He feeds hungry people in a desert, and He makes them full. He resurrects a dead girl, and He gives her life.

Moltmann is saying what we know in our hearts. Jesus' miracles are the only natural thing in an unnatural world because we were not *meant* to be blind. We were not *meant* to be sick. Kids were not meant to go hungry. They were not meant to be homeless. We were not meant to die. Anyone who has laid a loved one down into the ground knows this. Anyone who has sat by a hospital bed knows this. Sickness, death, hatred, racism, hunger, homelessness...those things are the aberration. Those things are unnatural, and Jesus is turning them back.

In other words, as Moltmann says, "Jesus' miracles are not a suspension of the natural order. They are restorations of the natural order." They are pointing back to the world the way it was. No poverty, no disease, no death. But more than that...more than that...they are pointing forward to a future...a new heaven and a new earth that Jesus Christ will bring about at infinite cost to Himself...a place where there shall be no more death, nor tears, nor pain or sickness, for the old order of things will have passed away.

This truth is our hope. This truth is the beginning of our healing. We are eagerly awaiting a Savior King with power who will bring all things under His control.

Chapter 3...redemption. Now how does Jesus accomplish this? It's funny because the last two weeks we've had a common theme of reversals. We didn't plan this. John Ortberg, our senior pastor, talked about the reversal of power...Jesus humbling Himself. Lindsay James talked about the reversal of values...switching the price tags. There are some major reversals going on here. Remember the massive inversion of sin in Genesis. What prompted it?

Well, there was a garden, and there was a tree, and there was a command about a tree. "Don't eat!" The serpent comes to Eve and tempts her. "Eve saw, and it was good." Coincidentally in the creation narrative, those are the same two verbs used of God. "God saw, and it was good." So Adam and Eve take the place of God in determining what is good for them. Despite God's command and despite God's warning, they took, and they ate. They took, and they ate. Their own take and eat became the infamous words of sin and rebellion.

Jesus at the Last Supper before His crucifixion sits down with the disciples. In the gospel of Matthew, chapter 26, verse 26 says, "While they were eating, Jesus took some bread. He gave thanks, and then He broke it. Then He gave it to His disciples saying, 'Take and eat. This is My body broken for you.'"

Many of us have taken part in a church tradition known as Eucharist or Communion. This is to remind us that it would require no less than the broken body of Jesus Christ, Son of God, to take the infamous words of sin and rebellion and turn them into words of redemption and salvation. If you have ever taken Communion, hear the words of Christ spoken over you. "Take and eat; this is My body broken for you." ...for your forgiveness, for your freedom, for your salvation.

After the supper Jesus goes into another garden. There is another temptation about a tree. You see, in the first garden, God tells Adam, "Obey Me about the tree, and you will live." Adam disobeyed, and his disobedience brought death. In the second garden, God tells Jesus...the second Adam..."Obey Me about the Tree, and You will die. You will surely die. You will be crushed. You will be crucified." Jesus obeyed. "Not My will but Your will be done." Jesus obeyed, and His obedience brought life.

The greatness of the invitation of the gospel is that on the Cross, Jesus takes our sin, and He pays our debt...our insurmountable, incredible debt. You have a debt, whether you believe it or not. I have a debt. Jesus pays that debt on the Cross, and He heals our brokenness. Jesus is the sacrifice, and He is the substitute. There are some cosmic reversals going on here...some cosmic reversals because on the Cross, He cries out, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*" which is "My God, My God. Why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus is alienated from the Father. He takes our brokenness with God...our spiritual alienation.

Matthew 27:28 says, "*The soldiers stripped Jesus naked and put a robe on Him and mocked Him.*" He is naked and put to shame. He takes our brokenness with self...our nakedness and our shame. In verse 30, it says, "*They spit on Him, and took the staff and struck Him on the head again and again.*" Jesus is

mocked, beaten, and wrongly accused. He takes our brokenness with one another...our blame and accusation.

Then it says, "*They twisted some thorns together and they placed them on His head.*" Is this coincidence? The thorns like nails were probably hammered into His head from the beating. Jesus literally takes the thorns...our brokenness with creation. This is the ultimate sacrifice. This is the ultimate substitution, and this is the ultimate reversal. Sin came into this world when man took the place of God, but sin was defeated in this world on the Cross when God took the place of man.

Does anyone here know that Jesus did not stay dead? I mean, I know we're Presbyterians, but does anyone here know Jesus did not stay dead? If you know Jesus did not stay dead, could I hear a great big Amen? Amen! Jesus did not stay dead. The grave could not hold Him. Sin and evil could not defeat Him. Death could not hold Him captive. Jesus was raised from the dead to show the world that death and sin have been swallowed up in victory as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15.

The invitation of the gospel is the invitation to experience this victory of Jesus over sin in your life and for yourself. It is an invitation to a salvation that is richer and deeper and more comprehensive or more beautiful than anything you could've ever imagined.

See, scholars have always commented on the grammar around the language of salvation. Because in some places in the Scripture, it says God *has* saved us. In other places in the Scripture, it says God *is* saving us. Yet in other places in the Scripture, it says God *will* save us. The question is...*Well, if God has saved us, why does it say God is saving us or God will save us?* For the Christian, this is conveying the comprehensive salvation of the gospel. If you have placed your ultimate hope in Jesus Christ as your sacrifice and your substitute, God *has* saved you from the penalty of sin. He *is* saving you now from the power of sin. He *will* save you one day from the presence of sin.

He has saved you from the penalty of sin; that's forgiveness. He is saving you now from the power of sin; that's freedom. He will save you one day from the presence of sin; that's redemption. That is the work of the Cross for you. That is the work of the Cross in you. That is the work of the Cross ahead of you. He is still in the resurrection business. He still brings order out of disorder, light from darkness, beauty out of chaos.

If there is chaos in your life, if there is disintegration in your life, if there is emptiness in your life, if there is darkness in your life...come to Jesus. There is no other hope. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done or where you've been. Because there is no dark dark enough that His light cannot penetrate. There is no addiction strong enough that His power cannot break. There is no sin...no stain...deep enough that His grace cannot cover and wash by the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Stand in that truth, church, and take and eat. Take and eat, and experience the victory Christ won for you. That's what's so great about the gospel!