

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

Week 1 - Day 3: Kingdom Paradise

"I couldn't earn it, I don't deserve it, still you give yourself away. Oh the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God!" - Reckless Love by Cory Asbury

Over the last year, my family has become passionate about planting succulents and cacti. We love to travel up and down the California coastline to discover new plant nurseries. Some of these nurseries are absolutely spectacular. They are a multisensory experience. You can see the bright colors, you can smell the fresh air and the fresh dirt, and you can hear fountains running with water. There is something about a garden that feels peaceful; like you don't want to leave.

As the Bible opens in the Book of Genesis, we see that all of life on Earth begins in a spectacular garden. God created the heavens and the earth, and then He created the first humans, Adam and Eve. Then, God placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden that He called Eden.

Genesis 2:8-14 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Last entry, we saw how God gave Adam and Eve meaningful work to do in the garden: their role was to work the garden and to take care of it to the glory of God. What was this **kingdom space** like for Adam and Eve? Imagine a place where there was peace and harmony between God and His people as they multiplied. Imagine a place where Adam and Eve walked with God together in the garden and spoke to each other freely. Imagine a time where there was no regret, no shame, no mistakes. How amazing is that, to live in a place where there is perfect harmony with God and each other; and with purpose.

When I speak to students, or to my friends who are far from God, I like to talk about the Creation story this way:

1. Good-

When God created Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, He saw that what He made was good. He created Adam and Eve- and all humanity, in His own image- and He was pleased with what He had made.

Genesis 1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

The GOOD nature of our world is our starting point as Christians. If we lose this starting point, our message of the Kingdom becomes one where we seek to escape this world of evil and suffering. Genesis 1 and 2 suggests that God's good and glorious kingdom will one day break through to the earth as we see today. God's mission is to restore all things IN THIS WORLD back to its "very good" status, not to disregard it!

2. Guilt-

Mankind has rebelled against God, and this rebellion has separated us from God.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We will discuss this in the story of Adam and Eve more in the coming days.

3. Grace-

Eventually, God makes a way to pay the penalty for humanity's rebellion against God's kingdom. Grace means that we receive something wonderful from God that we didn't deserve and could never earn.

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

4. God's people-

Since God pursues us, we are able to be united with others who are a part of His kingdom family. We have brothers and sisters who come from different nations, different backgrounds, and different walks of life. Together, we experience and advance God's kingdom all over the world. We are able to support one another in community with the same comfort that we have received from God Himself.

5. Gratitude-

Because of the love and grace that we have experience from God, we live lives of obedience to Him- out of gratitude, not out of obligation. I obey God because I love Him, not so that He will love me. I understand that He already loves me with 100% of His love right now.

As we move forward in this series, we will discover that this story of restoration and reconciliation between God and His creation is woven all throughout the story of the Bible. The story begins in the garden, and moves through the grand narrative of the Bible. The story then

moves to you and to me, to our neighbors and co-workers, and ends in the same garden space. It is God's desire that you and I would be His Kingdom agents, and that His Kingdom would expand into our homes, our neighborhoods, our schools and workplaces so that they might become God's kingdom space of peace and harmony! It begins when we say yes to a relationship with God and to His invitation to extend His Kingdom into our hearts and to our circles of influence.

You might be thinking all of this talk about paradise sounds so nice! Where is this experience today? In order to truly grasp the story of how God brings us back to His kingdom space, we must first learn about how we fell from it. That requires the existence of another kingdom that opposes God's rule; the kingdom of Satan.

-Rob Walter

Share the Gospel: The Garden of Eden represents God's kingdom space. The story of the Bible is not that we somehow escape this broken world, but one where God brings all things back to Himself in His kingdom space so that His family might experience His loving rule through a loving relationship with Him and a true sense of purpose!

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers: