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THE STORY

The Setting: Creation (Genesis 1–2)

The story of the world began when God spoke everything into existence. God was and is the only self-existent being, and therefore, as the all-powerful and sovereign Creator, He is set apart from creation and is perfectly good. We use the term *holy* to designate God's uniqueness. The holy Creator made all things, whether seen or unseen. He made everything good and for the purpose of glorifying Himself. He determined all purposes, rules, and parameters for everything that He created. The story of the world is all about God. His creation originally existed in perfect harmony, with everything fulfilling its creation purpose. God's special creation was mankind, whom God made to worship Him and enjoy a relationship with Him. But we are not like other creatures. God made us special in a way no other creature could be, because we have a soul. It is the distinct mark of the image of God. We are made as special reflections of our Creator, and we were made to reflect His glory. Because of this fact alone, there is a very special sacredness and value to human life. God placed Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, in a perfect environment,

and He gave them the freedom to choose to obey and worship Him or to reject Him. Therefore, they had the destiny of the entire human race in their hands.

The key components of the setting:

- God the all-powerful, self-existent Creator made everything that exists.
- God made it all and, therefore, He is the sovereign Ruler over it all.
- God is holy, and He made everything good and to exist for the purpose of His glory.
- God's special creation was humankind, made with a soul that is intended to exist in a relationship with God that reflects His glory.
- God gave the first human couple the freedom to choose to live in His grace and reflect His glory or to reject Him and disobey His creation purposes.

When we look around the world today, however, it's obvious the setting has changed and we are not living in paradise, where everything is fulfilling its creation purpose of bringing glory to God.

The Conflict: Fall (Genesis 3)

Adam and Eve chose to use the freedom God gave them to reject God and His authority over them. They chose to set themselves in opposition to God, with the idea that they could be autonomous from Him and free of His purposes and rules. When they chose to break God's law (an action we call sin), they became subject to the just wrath of God (God's righteous

judgment poured out against sin), and they subjected the world God created to the curse of sin's evil corruption. Denying God's authority over their lives, Adam and Eve ruined their fellowship with God. Furthermore, because they were the first human beings, their sin against God infected everyone who has followed after them. It is embedded in our human nature to sin by rejecting God as the rightful Ruler and living according to our own desires. Having rejected God and His authority, we are also guilty of sin. Now we exist in a broken relationship with our Creator, we are surrounded by a physically and morally broken world infected with evil and its consequences, and we constantly fail to fulfill our creation purpose of reflecting the glory of God. Being perfectly holy, God must judge sin. Else, He would not be perfectly holy. When we see sin in the glorious light of a holy God, we begin to understand why it is only right and just that God brings His judgment to all sinners and their sin. Specifically, and personally, we begin to see how we have offended God by transgressing His law and rejecting Him and His authority over our lives, time and time again. As sinners, we all face God's wrath against sin, which results in death and eternal separation from God Himself, who is the source of life. Even though Adam and Eve deserved immediate death and separation from God for all eternity, God pursued them and confronted them in their rebellion. In an act of mercy, God postponed the fulfillment of the final execution of His righteous judgment and wrath against sin, and He did not immediately destroy mankind. Though we were subject to the effects of the curse on the physical body and were separated from God, we were allowed to continue in our existence until God would bring about His plan of redemption. God

promised Adam and Eve He would one day restore His perfect creation order. Throughout the centuries, God has revealed glimpses of Himself and His redemptive plan to mankind, teaching us of His nature and love. He did this through His Scriptures, and He further solidified His promise to form for Himself one people from all the peoples on Earth to be His special people, redeemed and created anew. To be redeemed means our debt to God has been purchased and paid for so that we are freed from our bondage to that debt. The entire Old Testament—the Law, covenants, prophecies, the people of Israel and their sacrifices—points to the fact that mankind can never pay the debt we owe to God for our sinful rebellion. We are helplessly trapped under the bondage of sin and the curse of God’s judgment. That ultimately means physical death as well as spiritual death and eternal punishment from God under His active outpouring of judgment in a place we call hell.

The key components of the conflict:

- God made the first humans, Adam and Eve, and He gave them the gift of freedom.
- They took this freedom and chose to reject God and His authority over them.
- This act of rebellion subjected the whole creation, including every human, to the curse of sin and sin’s consequences, and, worst of all, ruined man’s relationship with God.
- Man is now subject to the just wrath and judgment of a holy God.
- God, being holy and perfectly just, must punish all sin.

- God, being holy and perfectly merciful, must redeem people from their sins.
- God, being personal, has revealed Himself through the ages, and He has repeatedly promised a coming redemption for mankind as well as a coming judgment.
- God has, through the ages, shaped history to point creation to the reality that all mankind is helplessly in bondage to sin and its consequences.

We are at the climax of the story's conflict, and it would seem we are at an impasse. What will a perfectly just and perfectly loving holy God do to bring about His judgment over sin and at the same time redeem His creation?

The Climax: Redemption (John 1, 14, 19–21)

Man was held in bondage to sin until the final judgment, but God, being rich in mercy, decided to pay the debt against our sin by taking the punishment due to us. God did this at just the right time by sending His only Son, Jesus. Jesus the “Christ,” or “Anointed One,” is also God, and He enjoyed the perfect fellowship that exists within the triune Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The gospel, or good news, message of redemption is that Jesus set aside His authority as God and left His throne to become fully human and be miraculously born to the virgin Mary so that He could live as one of us and fulfill God's creation purpose for mankind by perfectly obeying all of God's commands. He is uniquely the God-man. Though Jesus was innocent of sin, God delivered Him over to the hands of men and He laid His life down to die on the cross in our place as a substitute and to satisfy the

righteous judgment and wrath of God that we deserved. On the terrible cross, Jesus bore the weight of all our sins, and God's judgment of death fell on Him.

But the story is not over. Because Jesus is God, death could not defeat Him. And on the third day after His death, He physically rose from the grave. Through this victorious resurrection, He has provided the final vindication that God the Father has accepted His payment for our sins. After His resurrection from the dead, He spent some time with hundreds of His disciples—teaching them of things to come, enjoying fellowship with them, and eating with them—before He visibly ascended into heaven, where He is with God the Father until He returns for His church and the final judgment of those who have rejected Him.

The key components of the climax:

- God made all things, and mankind chose to reject Him as the Creator and Ruler.
- Every person is a sinner by nature and helplessly subject to the wrath and judgment of God against our sin.
- God determined to accomplish man's redemption by sending His only Son, Jesus, to pay man's sin debt.
- Jesus's death on the cross was the substitutionary sacrificial atonement necessary to satisfy the wrath of God against man's sin.
- Jesus's resurrection from the dead secures eternal life for those who follow Him, and it provides Jesus's payment for sins and His offer of the free gift of salvation to all who will receive it.