

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

◆ **Intro:** I wonder if you've seen the hit series Stranger Things. It's set in the early 80's where four middle school boys form a secret club. But on one particular night one of them (Will) goes missing. Spoiler alert, a gap to another world has opened and a terrifying creature from that world breaks in and out of ours in mysterious ways. That world is almost exactly like this one; same landscape, same trees, same streets, same buildings, same hallways. It's called The Upside-Down. And it simultaneously coexists and intersects, almost as if overlapping, with the same space and time as our world. Someone there could be in the same room as someone here, but the two cannot see the world of the other. The thing about the Upside-Down is that while it mirrors our world quite closely, there everything is dark and death, densely overgrown and devoid of much life. Like a ghost-town or the remnants of a civilization, always at night. I won't spoil anymore of it for you. But if you know the story, I want to draw a comparison.

◆ The Upside-Down resembles in some ways the Christian theology of hell. Hell is the absence of life & good and God, just as dark is not the presence of something so much as the absence light. And while the TV series doesn't postulate such a thing, I'd like you to imagine what I will call the Right-side-Up: also another dimension intersecting our own, coexisting perhaps in the same space and time, mirroring in many ways our own, except in the Right-side-Up everything is far *better and far brighter*. The

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

same trees on the same corner, only *healthier*. The same houses and the same hallways, only *neater* and *tidier*. The same woods but full of light instead of darkness. The same towns but full of movement and interaction and joyful life! In the Right-Side-Up, there is life to the full: sound, and music, and voices, and learning and discovery. It's not like a whole different place, but just like our place -only better. So what would it be like if there was a portal opened up in air of our world through which we could stick our hands and pull back into our world some wisdom from that one? Or through which would come a being from the Right-side-up? Not a terrifying being, but a magnificent one? I would like to suggest that the Right-side-up that I am describing is in fact, what the Bible means by the Kingdom of God. And we do have wisdom from the Right-Side-Up: God's holy word. And we have been visited by a being from there: Jesus the Messiah.

◆ In this season of Advent, or coming, we celebrate that God has come to earth in human form in his Son, Jesus. And we await his coming again. He came the first time to pay for human sin. But what will he be coming for the next time?

“so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Hebrews 9:28, NIV.

1. What are we waiting for?

◆ A. Lets go back to the beginning of our world. Genesis tells us that God created it out of nothing. Everything he made was

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

really good. Just to show that the power of creation is in him and not the creation, Genesis explains that God made light on the first day, but didn't make the sun or moon and stars until the fourth. God was producing a good world and a full world. He told the land to produce vegetation. He told the animals to fill the land. He told the birds to fill the sky. He told the sea to fill up with all kinds of life and marine creatures. And then he made a creature that was like him more than anything else; a spiritual, soul-ish, creature, the human. And he told them the same thing: fill up the earth; fill the planet with life and take care of the rest of it.

◆(look up) "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."" Genesis 1:27, 28, NIV.

◆B. But when our first parents sinned and disagreed with God they created a rift, a portal if you will, in the universe. Their world became something it was not before: fallen, stained, less-than-good place. Now, God and heaven and perfection did not cease to exist, it was just that humanity had made the choice to sin, a choice that caused their race and their place to become separated from the good, full presence of God. They had created their own Upside Down! Let me explain why.

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

◆ Fallenness cannot last long in the presence of holiness just as mildew can not survive in the presence of bleach. The one overcomes the other by nature.

◆ *"[God] alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no-one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might for ever. Amen." 1 Timothy 6:16, NIV.*

◆ God told Moses on Mt. Sinai...

◆ "But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live." Exodus 33:20, NIV.

◆ So God, in his grace, rather than flat out destroying the fallen world of man, decided to set it apart, and begin a plan to restore it to perfection. That's why they had to leave the Garden (v22f). That's why he wouldn't let them eat from the Tree of Life! He didn't want mankind to live eternally in a fallen state, in the Upside-Down.

◆ C. So you can see the predicament Adam and Eve left us. By staining our own nature with sinfulness, everything in our world got stained as well. Check God's description of what they had done to themselves in verses 16-19. Childbirth and marriage relationships got more difficult. The woman will want to control the man; the man will force his rule on her. Production, farming, and survival got more difficult. Physical and spiritual death commenced. The creation itself became a stained, or upside down version of what it was supposed to be. The apostle Paul, writes...

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

◆ *"The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Romans 8:19-23, NIV.*

◆ Again, where did upside-down state of the universe all come from? Us. It did not come from **God** who only does good, (although Adam and Eve try to lay the blame at his feet for making the woman and making the snake). It did not come from the environment; the **environment** was affected by it. It does not come from the **abuse** we suffer as children. [I have a pastor friend whose head is vastly misshapen. When he was a boy his mother beat his head with a rolling pin, and nailed his clothes to the kitchen floor so he couldn't move around. He could easily have decided to hate the world, become a serial killer and blame it on the insanity of his upbringing.] But no, the fallenness of the world does not come from the dominance of our **teachers**, or the **poverty** we endured, or from the bad **luck** we seem to have, or from the **oppression** our group has suffered at the hands of

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

the political machine of the country. You see, like Adam and Eve, we want to blame everything but ourselves for the wrong in the world. But the wrong in the world is who we are as people. You and I, every one of us is the problem. Sin is a disposition, a leaning toward evil, inside of every human being. It is not a disease you can catch or behavior we learn from our environment. It's in us.

◆“What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: “There is no-one righteous, not even one; there is no-one who understands, no-one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one.”” Romans 3:9-12, NIV.

◆Your mom has the potential to do devastating evil. Your brother has the same potential. Your dad, as much as you may love him, has an inner bent toward the wrong. You have this too. And so do I. In 1994 the Hutu people of Rwanda systematically went from house to house in their country and chopped up the Tutsi people. Men, women, children -brutalized and killed because of their ancestry. Over a million in 3 months. In the 1940's the German people systematically murdered 6 million Jewish people. In 1960 Israeli agents captured Adolph Eichmann, one of Hitler's masterminds of the Nazi holocaust, and brought him to Israel to stand trial for his crimes. Among the witnesses called to testify

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

against Eichmann was a small, haggard man named Yehiel Dinur. He had survived brutal torture in the death camp at Auschwitz. Dinur entered the courtroom and he stared at the man who had presided over the slaughter of millions— including many of Dinur's own friends. As the eyes of the victim met those of the mass murderer, the courtroom fell silent. Then, suddenly, Dinur literally collapsed to the floor, sobbing violently. Was he overcome by hatred? By memories of the stark evil that Eichmann had committed? No. As Dinur explained later in a riveting interview on "60 Minutes," what struck him was that Eichmann did not look like an evil monster at all; he looked like an ordinary person. Just like anyone else. In that moment, Dinur said, "I realized that evil is endemic to the human condition—that any one of us could commit the same atrocities." In a remarkable conclusion, Dinur said: "Eichmann is in all of us." Without outside intervention our upside-down world can never hope to be right-side-up.

◆ Now its time to answer the question we started with.

◆ **2. We are waiting for Restoration.** God is coming to restore Eden. Every piece of this statement is significant. We are not on a journey to God. God is on a journey to us. He has been since Eden. Talking to Satan, evil represented by the snake...

◆ *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:15, NIV.*

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

◆ We are not the initiator. On the other hand, God has was the initiator in creation and he would be the initiator in re-creation. There are four major movements in the history of the universe: Creation; Fall; Redemption; and Restoration (This is basically the outline of the Bible). Note well I did not say "creation, fall, achievement and escape". Or "creation, small dent, endurance, and evacuation". God created, man fell, God redeems (buys us back), and God will restore the world. Note also that Restoration implies that this world, and this human race is to be put back to its right order. It is not, as even many Christians seem to think, that God is going to scrap this world and start over. Remember the refiners fire of Malachi's prophecy?

◆ Now then, the world as God intended it is caught by the image of the Garden of Eden where sharing life and love, especially with creatures who could love in return, was in the original design. Life was there. The Tree of Life was there. And so was God. In Eden, God went on strolls with man, and discussed issues, and answered questions, and related directly. Can you even imagine? It is the nature of God to be with, or in other words, to love.

◆ But understand this, the Kingdom of God is not something we are leaving for. The Kingdom is something that has come and is coming to us. Jesus taught us to pray "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth, just like in heaven." This is the theme of our series and a theme of the sacred scriptures. The Bible begins with God coming and walking with man. The Bible ends with a

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

picture of heaven descending to earth, or the two places becoming one place, and the explicit statement that “now the dwelling place of God is with men, and he will live with them! (Rev.21:3). And all of biblical history in between is an account of God’s continuous coming to mankind for mankind could not come to him.

- ◆ God came down and called **Abraham** to start a nation. God came and walked and talked and discussed the state of society with Abraham (Gen.18).
- ◆ God came down at Sinai to speak to **Moses** about setting his people free. He came there again to give Moses the laws about how life works best. God came down to fill the **tabernacle** and temple with glory so brilliant the people couldn’t go into it.
- ◆ God came down in fire on Mt. Carmel with **Elijah**. And in a whisper!
- ◆ God came down and stood in the Babylonian **furnace** with Rack, Shack, and Benny.
- ◆ God came down in the incarnation of his Son, **Immanuel**: God with us.
- ◆ What does this all mean? We’ll be exploring this all month. But to start off, it means that it’s this world that God loves, this creation that he will restore. It is this race of humans that are meant to be his family. It’s this universe that he intends to

LONGING FOR EDEN, GEN.3

Heaven Come Down #1

restore and that restoration all began with redemption through Jesus Christ.

◆ *"For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." Colossians 1:19, 20, NIV.*

◆ *"This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven..." Colossians 1:23, NIV.*

◆ **Conclusion:** Are you a creature under heaven? Yes you are. This gospel is for you. This gospel is your only hope for the future. N.T. Wright puts it "what God did for Jesus at Easter (resurrection) he will do not only for all those who are "in Christ" but also for the entire cosmos!" This makes Jesus born at Christmas the center of all existence. The axis of existence. His death for human sin, and resurrection from death, was the turning point in which all of the universe began to move from upside-down to right-side-up. And the finishing of that is what we are waiting for, longing for, sighing for. The Right-side-Up is coming! It has broken in. Is there anything upside down in you? Take it to Jesus. As Jesus himself said, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe."