

Welcome back to our series on the Big Ten. Like the shirt? (Wear a Michigan shirt.) Of course all of the college football fans in the room know that Big Ten Conference play began yesterday. That means that 5 teams won and 5 lost in the conference opener. For the teams with title hopes that lost, the season got messed up yesterday. We all know that life doesn't always work out the way we plan. (Spill some coffee on the Michigan shirt.) Oops! Spilt coffee on a clean shirt is like forbidden fruit on an empty stomach. It changes everything.

Last Sunday we started talking about 10 realities that shape our lives by pointing out that fact that because God made us and loves us, our lives have value, meaning, and an eternal destination. Today's reality is that God gives us hope to face our messed up lives.

Think of what happened when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the garden. They not only disobeyed God, but they had to face some tough consequences for their actions. After that they did the one thing that God asked them not to do, Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. Their perfect relationship with God was broken. On top of that, Adam tried to pass the buck by blaming Eve and even God for what happened when he said, ***"It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it."*** (Genesis 3:12 NLT) Of course it didn't work. It must have been a long, cold night for Adam after he was kicked out of the garden.

We don't always realize the unintended consequences of our actions. When the royal baker to the king of England sparked a fire on the night of September 1, 1666, it didn't seem like a big deal at first. But the fire got out of control, burned for five days and leveled 80% of the city. When Adam and Eve ate took the forbidden fruit in their hands to eat it, it may not have seemed all that significant. But their actions brought sin and death into our world. Everyone since has been infected with this deadly disease. Romans 8 tells that our world has suffered as a result. ***"For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."*** (Romans 8:22 NLT) That is not all. Jesus even told His disciples that things would get worse before His return.

So if you want to know why life is so messed up, why there are so many problems in the world, you have an answer. The answer is sin! We are all guilty of disobeying God. We all suffer the consequences. Don't try to blame God, your parents, your boss, your spouse or anyone else. It won't work. The world and our lives have been messed up by sin. Just as God gave Adam the freedom to obey Him or disobey Him, He has given that same option to us. We can't blame God when we chose to do the wrong thing. We can't blame God when other people chose to do bad things. But we can look to God for help when our lives are messed up.

The world was a mess at the time of Nehemiah. When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, they destroyed the temple and tore down the walls of the city. Many of the Israelites were taken into captivity in Babylon. Some of the Jewish people rose to positions of importance in their new lands. After the Babylonians were defeated by Cyrus, the Israelites were allowed to return to

their homeland and to rebuild Jerusalem. But things were not going well. The people that lived in the surrounding areas did not want the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt, so they launched attacks against the workers. Nehemiah had risen to a place of importance in the royal court. When he heard how poorly things were going in Jerusalem, he asked for permission to help rebuild the walls of the city. God gave Nehemiah the opportunity and ability to lead this effort. God was at work in the middle of the mess to make things better for Israel.

God is a work in the middle of our messed up world to make things better, too. How many times do we look at a bad situation and say, “Someone should do something about that?” Well, God looked at the mess that sin made in our world and promised to do something about it. God told the serpent, the devil that had deceived Adam and Eve, ***“I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”*** (Genesis 3:15 NLT) That was the first promise of the Savior, the promise that was fulfilled when Jesus was born in our messed up world. Satan thought he struck a deadly blow to Jesus on the cross, but Jesus rose from the dead. Satan’s power was destroyed by the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus came into our mess to rescue us, to restore our broken relationship with God.

God is still ready to help us face any of the messes that we face in life. Not only did Jesus pay the debt for our sin, but He also forgives us. That means that when we trust in Him and ask for His forgiveness, we are not stuck with guilt and shame. But that is not all. Jesus also promises us the Holy Spirit, to be our Counselor or guide for life. God doesn’t promise to take away all of our problems, but He does promise to be with us, to guide us, to help us face whatever comes along. God gives us this promise in Romans 8, ***“And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.”*** (Romans 8:26 NLT) And He does promise that the things we are facing right now are insignificant in comparison with the good things He has in store for us.

There is one thing we have to remember. If we want God to help us, we have to trust Him. Jesus told a story about a Pharisee and a Tax Collector who went to the temple. The Pharisee thought he had done everything right, put his trust in himself and offered this prayer, ***“I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else.”*** On the other hand, the Tax Collector knew he had messed up and prayed, ***“O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.”*** (Luke 18:11, 13 NLT) Jesus said that the Tax Collector was forgiven, the Pharisee wasn’t. Who do you trust? When you trust only yourself, you get only yourself. When your trust God, you get God! And when you trust God, He will help you face the messes of life. By the way, just as a little laundry soap can wash the coffee stain out of this shirt, God in Christ can wash away our sins and make us clean. Amen.