

The Gospel In Chairs

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[0 : 00] So one of my first memories of the gospel of church stuff is being in like a preschool, a Catholic preschool, where the teacher was talking about like color symbolism in the church.

It was like a great preschool lesson, I guess, and talking about how the color yellow represented things that were divine. So we'd go around in different places of this little preschool room finding all the things that were yellow, like this is God, this is God, this is God, which is bad theology.

But those sorts of things, like those first introductions, even if you weren't like a church person, even if you didn't grow up in church all your life, you still get kind of influenced by all these ways that spiritual, divine things get passed on to us through movies and television shows and books and culture.

And maybe you did get taken to some sort of church where they were laying down theology and beliefs. And you carry that with you, even if you make a conscious effort to try to push it away, you still carry it with you.

And what we're going to do over the next eight weeks is spend some time unpacking some of those beliefs. And as a church, trying to explore what is it exactly that we are for.

[1 : 13] We talked a little bit about this last week even of not only knowing, hey, we're not like those other churches or those other Christians, which can be a very us versus them mentality, but rather saying this is how we want to talk about God.

One theologian says that theology is shared or common language about God. So it's not necessarily that we have it right, we finally figured out all the right answers, but at least we have some common language for it.

And we want to start our new series. It's called A More Beautiful Gospel. We want to start a series tonight with just an explanation of what is the good news, what is the gospel.

Now, I've been preaching for almost half my life, about 17 years. And as far as I can remember, I've never done what I'm going to do tonight before, which is basically preach someone else's sermon.

I've always written my own sermon. Sure, I use resources and books and commentaries, but always the words are basically my own. But there's this one presentation of the gospel that I am so enamored with that I wish everybody would see it.

[2 : 18] But if I share it on Instagram or Twitter or whatever, I know most of you would just click on buy, so would I. And so I'm just going to inflict this on you all tonight. So this is the first time I've been nervous about a sermon in a long time because I had to do some memorization.

And I told my wife, Emily, earlier this morning, I'm going to go downstairs and practice and she looked at me and she's like, you never practice. I'm like, well, today's the day. So this is a presentation by a theologian and a pastor named Brad Jerzak.

It's called The Gospel in Chairs. And Brad Jerzak, he's an Eastern Orthodox priest. He says he actually learned it from other Eastern Orthodox priests as a way of talking about the good news, the gospel that Christians believe in.

In the way that we talk about the gospel, I'm going to tell it in two ways. So the first way is going to be the legal model, the courtroom model, where sin is this law-breaking behavior that must be punished by a righteous judge named God.

That's the legal or the courtroom model. It's a law-breaking behavior that has to be punished by a judge. And so the gospel then is how God figures out the right way to punish sin.

[3 : 36] That Jesus came to be punished instead of us. And so if we don't accept, then we get punished anyway. And then the second way I'm going to present the gospel is called the therapeutic or hospital model of the gospel, where sin is not a law-breaking behavior, but sin rather is a corrosive disease that a good physician has to figure out how to heal.

And you can't punish a disease. You can't like spank the flu out of a child. You can't put somebody in jail until their cancer goes away. Disease needs cure.

Disease needs healing. There's some people outside the door. I just want to make sure they're being noticed. Disease needs a doctor, not a judge.

So that's the big broad brushstrokes of what I'm going to do tonight, the legal model, the therapeutic model. Now, all that said, these are metaphors. The way that the gospel has historically been talked about in the church is that story, is that narrative.

Churches, when they talk about the gospel, they're talking about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the life, death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus. The early church, that it was so important that we get the idea of gospel as story right, that they didn't choose between four different gospels.

[4 : 50] They put all four in the New Testament. And so what I'm doing tonight is metaphor, condensing it down, but recognize that the metaphor is not the whole thing. All right?

Does that make sense? All right. So this is the gospel in chairs. By the way, I had to hunt through this entire building. Could not find a folding chair to save my life except these tiny little chairs.

But for someone who's five foot four, that's perfect for me. So in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And God created humanity and placed them in a garden to be fruitful, to multiply, to steward creation.

But then the unthinkable happens, and humanity sins. And they reject God, and they are rejected by God. God sees their sin and has to punish them because God is a holy, righteous judge, cannot look upon sin, and so has to kick them out of the garden.

And no matter what humanity does to try to make things right with God, to create religion and rituals, God is too holy and just and righteous to look on sin.

[6 : 03] And so humanity always stays estranged from God. And this story happens again and again and again. You have the story of Abraham.

God sometimes does go down and tries to make things right with humans, but humans, they, you know, turn their back on God. And so Abraham, he's been promised a nation that his people will be like the sands of the seashore, greater than the stars and the sky.

But Abraham takes things into his own hands, and so he decides to go and have a child with a slave. And so God, being holy and just and just and righteous, has to reject Abraham's attempt.

Moses goes and tries to take things into his own hands. He tries to kill the Egyptians, send the Egyptians down to the depths of hell in an attempt to make right for his people, the Israelites.

But God is too holy and right and justice, and so sends Moses away. David has been promised by God a people, a kingdom that will have no end, a kingdom through which Messiah will come.

[7 : 10] But David has a problem with pot tubs. And so God is too holy and just and righteous and must not be in relationship with David any longer.

We see this again in the prophets. The prophets, they tell the stories of how Israel is meant to be God's people.

God, won't you listen? God, won't you set your people free? God, won't you get us out of exile? Please, God, won't you pay attention to us? But God is too holy and just and righteous and must, of course, punish Israel and send them away.

And so God and humanity stay estranged. So here's what God's going to do. God is going to send Jesus. And Jesus is going to be with people.

Jesus is going to be sent into the world, be the new Adam, the second Adam, be what the first Adam could never be. But then humanity does the unthinkable again, and they try to murder Jesus.

[8 : 24] They put him up on a cross. And so Jesus is on the cross. And what God does is he sends, puts all of the sin and guilt and shame of all of humanity on to Jesus.

And then Jesus says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And so the father turns his face away and then vents all of his wrath, all of his righteous anger upon Jesus for the sin of the world.

And Jesus dies. Now, thank goodness Jesus didn't actually sin. So the father raises Jesus from the dead.

And if you believe that Jesus is the son of God, if you put your trust and your faith in him, then if you believe that Jesus died for you, then you are granted eternal life.

You are made right with God. The courtroom is happy. The legal model is fulfilled. Your debt is canceled. All is okay. But if you don't believe, if you reject this gospel, and if you die that way, then God has no choice but to continue to vent his wrath upon you because you have died and your sins and you will suffer for that forever.

[9 : 54] And there's this urgent plea in typical gospel presentations. This is the gospel that I was grown up in. This is even the gospel that I preached for a long time and saw results from.

There's this desperate plea. You must believe today because if you don't, this will be the end. And so people then turn to God so they can avoid their fiery end.

And who wouldn't want to believe in a God like that? Well, it turns out lots of people. Turns out that when you present a God who is basically dangling people over the fires of hell, you present a God that has to be placated, has to vent wrath upon God's own son, turns people into atheists.

People don't want to believe in a God like that. Now, in my opinion, there are three reasons why this gospel presentation doesn't work.

Number one, who saves us? Yes, Jesus comes. He dies on the cross. If we believe in him, we can have eternal life.

[11 : 08] But whose decision is it ultimately to be saved? Well, it's our decision. It's up to us. It's conditional upon our acceptance of this gospel.

It's conditional upon our believing that this is true. If we don't, then we go down into the fiery depths. But I don't think this actually resonates with the God that I see in Scripture.

Jesus tells this parable. The lost sheep. There's a flock of a hundred. One of the sheep goes astray into the ditch. The good shepherd, God, Jesus, leaves the 99 and goes after the one lost sheep.

And this is the very words of the parable. It says, God looks until he finds it. The God presented in Scripture is not waiting for us to make our way home, but is rather going out on God's own accord to go find until, go search and look until he finds it.

So in this presentation of the gospel, it seems very conditional, very much up to me and my response, my reaction. Problem number two is that it pits God against people.

[12 : 27] This whole idea that God is too holy and just and righteous and has no choice but to look away from sin and evil people.

Where did we get this idea from? Well, I can tell you. It's half a verse in the book of Habakkuk chapter 1, verse 13, I think. Habakkuk 1, 13.

There's this half of a verse where the prophet is complaining to God and says, God, you are too pure and righteous to look upon sin and to gaze upon the evildoer.

And so we took that half of a verse and built an entire theology off of it, that God is too holy and just and righteous to look on sin and has no choice but to punish it.

As if there's God and then there's some power that's slightly higher than God that God has to obey. God has no choice but to look away from sin and sinners.

[13 : 22] But we have to keep reading the verse. We've got very poor attention spans, it turns out, because the prophet keeps going. He says, oh God, your eyes are too pure and too holy to look upon sin, to look upon the evildoer.

And then Habakkuk continues and he says, so why do you? There's this idea in the prophetic scriptures that yes, God is holy and righteous and just, but seems to keep getting in the mud with his people.

Seems to keep getting in the dirt. Seems to keep leaving the 99 and going hunting after the one, even getting into the weeds with them. That doesn't seem to be a God who is against people.

There's another verse in Isaiah 59. It says, your sin has cut you off from God. So again, seems like to be pretty clear cut. There's people, there's God, people sin.

God has no choice but to cut the people off. But again, you have to keep reading. Your sin has cut you off from God. And so God responds and says, so here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to pull up my sleeve, reach out my right arm, which is symbolism in Isaiah for the Messiah, and I will rescue them.

[14 : 33] I'm not going to wait for them to repent and make their way back to me. I'm going to make the first move of rescuing. In the legal metaphor, God can't look at you because you're too sinful.

God is too just and righteous. One old theologian, long dead and gone, but one old theologian put it like this. He said, people, you are like snow-covered dung.

There's this mental image of like, hey, don't forget, you're poo. But Jesus, don't worry, tricked God and put some snow over you so God doesn't have to be so angry at you anymore.

But don't forget, you're still poo underneath. There's a more modern theologian who put it like this. He said, Jesus is the asbestos suit that you put on to protect you from the white, hot wrath of God.

So there's an angry God, and there's Jesus who's like, no, Daddy, don't hurt them. Any of you see the Hurt Locker? You see those big bomb outfits, which are kind of like, are you sure this is actually going to help?

[15 : 44] But it's like putting on a bomb outfit of Jesus to protect you from the explosive anger of God's righteousness. And this is not like a straw man.

This is how people still preach the gospel today. An angry God, a sinful people, and Jesus who has to get in between. Which gets me to the third problem.

So problem number one, it makes it very conditional. It's up to you about whether or not God's going to save you. Number two, it pits God against God's people. Number three, it pits God against Jesus.

Jesus is on the cross and says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And so we have this theology that God had no choice but to turn his face away from Jesus.

Again, where did we get this idea? Well, from some of our hymns. The Father turns his face away. And from not understanding how Scripture works.

[16 : 41] So we call things like Psalm 22, Psalm 22. But if you're an Israelite, you would call a psalm by its first line. This is true of how Jews refer to their scriptures today.

Usually the first word or couple of words, that was the title of a biblical book or a song of Israel. What we call a psalm. And so Jesus is on the cross and he names a psalm.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Which we know is Psalm 22. Again, attention span. We look at the first line and we built this whole theology about a God and Jesus who are opposed to each other.

But Psalm 22 has more than one line. From a Christian perspective, a Jesus perspective, Psalm 22 is actually a story about the crucifixion. It has lines like, they pierced his hands and his feet.

It says that Psalm 22 says they spent lots, they cast lots to know who would get the afflicted garments. All these things happened to Jesus. And prophetically, whoever wrote Psalm 22 is prophesying about these events.

[17 : 49] And then the psalm continues. This goes like this. This is Psalm 22, verse 22. I will proclaim, this is the afflicted psalm writer writing, I will proclaim your name to my siblings.

In the midst of the assembly, I will praise you, God. You who fear the Lord, praise him. This is the psalm that begins, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you descendants of Jacob, glorify him.

Stand in all of God, all you descendants of Israel. Why? Why would the psalm that begins with, why have you forsaken me? Say, now praise this God. Verse 24, For God has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted, nor, listen, listen, has God turned his face away.

But when he cried to him for help, he heard. And so what does Jesus say on the cross to God the Father? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Evoking all of Psalm 22, this crucifixion psalm that says, now praise him because the Father has not turned his face away, that him be damned.

[18 : 58] God has not turned his face away. And then Jesus says, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Jesus knows God has not abandoned him. Jesus knows that he can commit his spirit to the Father because the Father is good.

The Father is good. And so the way Christians have spoken about the Trinity throughout the centuries, this idea of Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, is that they are united in will and purpose and passion.

And so what is true of God is true of the Son, is true of the Spirit. And so when we pit Father and Son against each other, that the Father could somehow turn God's face away from God's own Son, we make a mockery of Christian theology that says, no, they are united.

God did not turn his face away because he's too holy and just and righteous to look on sin. No, God was in the flesh and the person of Jesus on the cross.

So, three problems with this model. It makes it very conditional, makes it very much about us. What are you going to do? It pits, number two, it pits God versus humanity, God versus God's creation.

[20 : 16] And number three, it pits God versus Jesus. It makes nonsense of the Trinity, of this united person, God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, with those three things in mind, let's go into our second model of the gospel and shares, the hospital model, the healing model. And it begins very much the same.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and he created humanity and he placed them in a garden and he said, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, care for it, take care of it.

But, humanity does the unthinkable. They sin and they experience death. And so, what does God do? Well, God goes looking for them.

Adam and Eve go and hide, but God says, Adam, Eve, where are you? What are you wearing on your genitals there? Adam and Eve, like, you know, they experience this shame thing. Well, he did it, she did it, it did it.

[21 : 15] And so, God, in God's mercy, sends them out of the garden because they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that there's a risk that if they eat of the tree of life, that they will be stuck permanently in this cursed state.

And so, God, in his mercy, sends them away from this tree so they're not stuck in this cursed state. And God goes with them, sows for them clothes to cover them, to deal with their shame.

And so, Adam and Eve, they have children. They have two sons, Cain and Abel. And Cain is out working and Cain begins to get an idea in his head that he's going to kill his brother.

So, what does God do? God goes looking for Cain. Cain, what are you thinking about? Nothing. God says, sin is crouching at your door, ready to strike.

Be cautious. Don't do it. So, what does Cain do? Oh, Cain does it. Kills his brother. What does God do? God goes looking for Cain. Cain, what have you done? Where is your brother?

[22 : 20] I don't know. None of my business, is it? God says, well, actually, it is. And so, Cain, he goes east of Eden, begins civilization built on a foundation of murder, and God just goes finding Cain, places a mark on his head to protect Cain so that no one would have vengeance against him.

The story repeats and repeats. God goes to Abraham, says, Abraham, I'm going to bless you. I'm going to make you a nation of peoples greater than the sands of the seashore, greater than the stars in the heaven.

But Abraham tries to take things into his own hands. Has a child with the slave. What does God do? God goes to Abraham, blesses Abraham anyway, and meets the slave and her child out in the desert.

The slave is the first person in scripture to name the divine God, and God promises the slave and her son that they too will be a people of nations.

God goes to David, says, David, upon your throne I will build an everlasting kingdom from whom a branch, a Messiah, will come. But David goes running to the hot tub. So God goes and finds David, goes and finds Bathsheba.

[23 : 37] from Bathsheba. From her comes Solomon, upon which that everlasting kingdom will be built and reconciles with David. Hosea, the prophet, says, O God, our people, they are wicked and evil.

They oppress the foreigner. They harm the orphan. They hurt the poor. They refuse to take care of their widows. God, you must destroy them. You must punish them.

And God says, mmm, can't do it. I was just looking at their baby photos. They're so cute. Don't you remember the first time they were walking? I will not, God says, I will not let my heart turn away from my children.

So here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to send my prophets to preach a more beautiful gospel. Before they repent, before they turn back, I will send my prophets to preach this more beautiful gospel.

I will pursue my people out of love. which, you know, as a reminder, you don't need to be afraid of the God of the Old Testament, the God of the Hebrew Bible. Yes, there's stories of the prophets who tell of this wrathful, angry God, but then God keeps showing up in this, what we find surprising way of, no, I will relent.

[24 : 51] I will forgive. I will not destroy. Go to the New Testament. And you start hearing stories of Jesus.

There's a man who's short of stature. Probably need a chair like this. And so he starts compensating, makes a deal with the Roman Empire, starts collecting taxes on their behalf, and starts collaborating with the enemy.

And in doing so, he loses his faith community, he loses his people, he loses his family, and to top it all off, he starts taking some money on the side, lining his own pockets, and not just some money, but a lot, a lot, a lot of money.

One day, God comes walking by, walks under a tree, and says, hey, Zacchaeus, I'll be your friend. And they go home together.

And Jesus, Rabbi, by entering into the house of this supposedly evil, wicked man, actually evil, wicked man, Jesus declares his house and this person clean.

[26 : 05] Zacchaeus is so moved by the preemptive love of God, Zacchaeus says, I'm going to give it all back with interest, and I'll give the rest of what I own off to the poor.

There's a woman. She's been married, used by a man, and then divorced, and then married, and used by a man, and then divorced, and then married, and used by a man, and then divorced, and then married, and used by a man, and then divorced, and now is living with a man who, because of her socially suspect, suspect status, is unwilling to marry her anymore, but still want to use her body, because in that time, in that culture, women were seen as maybe a little bit more than property, but not much more. And so she goes off to the well during the noon hour, the hottest part of the day, because she knows no one else is going to be there. What does God do? Meets her there.

Says, I know what your problem is. You're thirsty. And I can give you a drink that will cause springs of water to burst forth from your very soul that you will never be thirsty again.

And she becomes, a little church tradition history lesson here, she becomes the Samaritan woman at the well. She becomes Saint Photina, the luminous one, equal to the apostles, one of the first evangelists to go and spread this more beautiful gospel to her people and beyond. And church tradition says that her and her sons are martyred for their faith by being thrown down a well.

Because I can imagine that she won't shut up about this God who shows up and offers her mercy. There's a story of a man. He can't walk.

[28 : 01] And in those days, you understood that God did everything. And so if you can't walk, it's because God did that because you did something to tick off God. And so your inability to walk is because of your sin. So what does God do? After he brushes the plaster out of his hair, he looks up and sees the roof being torn off the place by four faithful friends who lower their friend down. The first thing that Jesus says, he says, son, your sins are forgiven. Jesus detaches disability from disobedience.

He detaches this man's inability to walk with anything that he did. But anybody can say, sure, your sins are forgiven. So Jesus says, yes, but can anybody say, son, pick up your mat and walk?

And the man gets up and walks. There's a woman. She is caught in the act of adultery. And so a group of murderous men put her, cast her, throw her down in front of Jesus, to which we ask the question, where the leap is the man? It's a setup. She's been set up to set Jesus up, to catch him in a rhetorical trap. So what does Jesus do? What does God do? Does he, who's so holy and righteous and just, pick up the stone so he can start the execution process? That's what it says he should do. He's God. He's righteous and just, right? No. God kneels down, starts scribbling in the dust, one by one from oldest to youngest. Her accusers walk away. Jesus looks at her in the eye and says, where are your accusers? She says, sir, they're gone. So God says, neither do I condemn you.

Go and sin no more. Now, if you're anything like me and you grew up in churches like mine, you heard that story kind of like, go and sin no more. All of a sudden, like, Jesus does this great act of compassion and mercy, but like, but don't forget the rules. But what I think is happening is that Jesus is telling this woman, you don't have to go back to the man who's going to leave you for dead. You don't have to go back to that story. It's like today never happened. Neither do I condemn you. There's a man who's so demonized that he's been locked up by the grave, the tombs. He's naked. He can't keep clothes on himself. He's bruised and broken. He's lost his dignity and his humanity. And so what does God do? God gets on a boat, crosses the Sea of Galilee, steps foot on the, on the shores of the Decapolis, meets this foreign man in his own territory, in his own land, and the demons shake because God has stepped into the sea.

And God leans in, casts the demons out, gives this man his dignity and his humanity again. And hilariously, the man says, let me follow you. And Jesus is like, don't, don't waste your time with that. Go back to your people. Tell them the rumors of this more beautiful gospel.

[31 : 44] There's stories here at the table that I could spend the rest of our night telling you, of people who have been hurt and rejected. A person who had given up on faith, on religion, on God, and actually heard one of, one of our preaching team, Heidi, preach a sermon and reference disability in this non-judgmental, this kind way. It's the first time this person ever heard a sermon like that. A person came to confront an addiction issue, got word of people who could care for her, who could take care of them, who could help them through the journey and the process. Heard rumors of a more beautiful gospel of a God who was not going to turn his face away, but rather lean in and embrace. A story of another person who had given up on God, had given up on faith, had given up on Jesus, and then came to encounter Jesus and the people of this church, who said, I never thought I could feel hope again. And so they heard and experienced the love of God through this, this people.

Of another, a couple who, they want to get married, but they seem to love the wrong gender. And so went to church, to church, to church, and we experienced rejection again and again until they heard rumors of a more beautiful gospel where God's love is not conditional. God is not pitted against you, but leans in in love and affection. So at last, humanity does the unthinkable, and they murder Jesus. They put him up on a cross. They crucify him.

And what does God do? God welcomes their affliction onto him with open arms and says, God, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.

In other words, I forgive you. Jesus's death, then, is not about Jesus standing in front of an angry, abusive father saying, no, stay out of the way. It's rather about the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, Together, Confronting Head-on, the Corrosive Powers of Sin and Death and Evil.

The cross is not about punishment. It's about rescue. It's why it's called salvation. Salvation not from the wrath of God. Salvation not from God himself, because that would just make God into the pagan deities of old. It's what N.T. Wright calls the paganization of God, that we make it out that God has to be placated. We have to have a sacrifice in order to make God not so angry at us.

[35 : 03] No, God is not like that. Rather, God in Christ, this is the book of Romans, God in Christ is reconciling the world to himself, not counting sins against us.

1 John chapter 3 says, this is the reason that God, the Son of God, appeared, was to undo the devil's work. Hebrews chapter 2 says, Jesus did all of this to break the one who holds the power over death, the devil. Colossians chapter 2, Jesus disarmed on the cross the powers and the authorities, spiritual and physical. Jesus made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

God then is not a judge who must punish sin, but rather a great physician, a great rescuer, rescuing God's people out of evil's clutches. Keep this in mind. The New Testament, in the New Testament you have the word *sozo*. Let me all hear you say the word *sozo*.

Sozo is a word that can mean save. It can also be translated heal. And so whenever you come across that word salvation, we need to be saved, you can exchange in your mind healing. That God is working in the world to bring our healing. There are some who run from God today, and God runs after them. There are some of us, we run really far from God. And God, from everything we've seen in Scripture, runs really far to come and get us.

The story of the Scripture, the story of the cross, is that God, who took on humanity, is now inviting humanity, is now inviting humanity to take on divinity. This is how the ancient church put it. God became human so that humans can become God. There ain't no self-help book, New Age, Oprah Magazine gospel that's as good as that. God became human so that human can become God.

[37 : 32] Now, I don't know you've been told this. I've been told that, you know, if you run away from God, if you turn away from God, then it gets really, really hard to hear God. But not in my experience.

In my experience, I turn from God, and God's like, hey, what you doing? I'm like, God, can't you just give me 20 minutes? Nope. Nope. So what does God do?

You can run straight into the grave. If you want. God gives us that freedom. But this is what the creeds, this is what Scripture, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Peter, this is what has been declared through the centuries, that God does not abandon us in the grave, but God in Christ descended into hell, descended into Hades, and this is 1 Peter, preached the gospel to the spirits in prison, and then this is Ephesians 3, then the spirits in prison came up out of the grave with Jesus. When Jesus ascended, so were those who were stuck in the chains of Hades, of hell, of death.

Jesus rose from the dead. God rose from the dead, says, I was dead, but now I'm alive. Book of Revelation chapter 1 says, behold, I hold the keys to death in Hades.

If Jesus holds the keys to death in Hades, what do you think he's going to do with them? John chapter 5 says, all those who are in the grave will hear the voice of the Son of God, and will rise on the last day. Now, it does say, some to everlasting life, and some to judgment, but this is how I think it works.

[39 : 28] You can continue to run away. God gives you the ability to say no. But does God's character suddenly change upon death? The Hebrew Bible is very clear about this. There's this national chorus, this national refrain of the book of Psalms that says, his mercy endures, I bet you know this part, his mercy endures for how long?

His mercy endures for how long? His mercy endures for how long? And his loving kindness is ever... So you can run away from God, but God is just going to keep on running after you.

And I bet you could run for a really, really long time. Maybe, maybe, possibly, you could run from all eternity. But what we do know for sure is that you can never outlast the everlasting, forever love of God.

His loving kindness has no time limit. There's no clock dangling above you. If you love love, then it'll feel like heaven.

If you love the kind of God who is merciful and kind, a kind of God who always meets you where you're at, the kind of God who is forgiving, then that will feel like heaven.

[40 : 50] If you hate love, if you're the kind of person who hates mercy and kindness and grace, then it may feel like hell. But what I know is that you will always be face to face with a loving, kind God.