

# RESTORATION BEGINS WITH THE UNEXPECTED

## Genesis 3

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

June 27, 28 and July 1, 2020

Every once in a while a story comes along that causes you to pause and to be inspired. John Croyle's story did it for me on Fathers' Day. John played for Coach Bear Bryant and the University of Alabama when Bama won the National Championship in '73. John Croyle turned his back on a promising NFL career and in 1974 he and his wife, Teresa, started Big Oak Ranch for Boys bringing healing and restoration to broken lives now for 46 years! Big Oak Ranch for Girls came in '88. He is now a father-figure to 2000+ orphaned boys and girls.

John's inspiration came at age 19. As a camp counselor he met a boy from New Orleans whose mom was a prostitute. The boy served as her banker and timekeeper! John talked to the boy about Jesus and later learned he became a Christian. The inspiration was born! Coach Bryant helped him get started.

A woman once called and asked, "Are you that man who gives kids a home? Well, I got two of them. You want 'em?" At the truck stop, John met an 11-year old boy and his 10-year old sister. Their eyes spoke what John later learned—they had been trafficked by their own mother. John said to the two what he says to all his kids: "If you want to come and live with us, you are welcome to. But there are four things you need to know. I love you. I'll never lie to you. I'll stick with you till you're grown. And there are boundaries—don't cross 'em." And so the journey begins.

John Croyle learned a truth from his God that he lives every day of his life: **RESTORATION BEGINS WITH THE UNEXPECTED, A PROMISE AND THE WILL TO SEE IT THROUGH.**

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### 1. A PROMISE

#### A. Out of Nowhere

Every once in a while a story comes along that causes you to pause and to be inspired. It happened the first time in the Garden of Eden. A promise came out of nowhere and knocked the socks off Adam and Eve (they didn't have socks, but you get the point!). But it was actually the darkness first that came out of nowhere—darkness you could *feel* on that sunny day--something they had never known before. The serpent had promised enlightenment, improvement—"***You will NOT surely die. You will be LIKE God, knowing good and evil.***" What came was DARKNESS...that Adam and Eve could FEEL! Darkness they could not shake because they knew it was deserved!

Have you known such darkness? My mom said one time, "You can play at the neighbors, but don't get into the paint they are using to paint their fence." When the dinner bell rang, my sister and I were busted! They were using oil-based paint and no amount of scrubbing at the backyard faucet could get the paint off our hands. We had made white gloves of paint...and mom was closing in! Darkness! "Blessed are those who hear the word of mom and obey it" – something like that.

#### B. From the Heart of God

You and I have reviewed before, haven't we, that true love is a decision? How could John Croyle tell two kids he had never met, "I love you. I'll never lie to you. And I'll stick with you till you're grown." That kind of love has nothing to do with the cuteness of a newborn, affection won over weeks of dating, or what you've done to warm my heart. That kind of love—true love—is a decision. The world first felt it in the night of its sin.

God could have come thundering; he had every right! Instead he came walking in the garden in the cool of the day. He could have come with a sharpness to his voice, "*Adam! Where are you?!*", but instead he came with an invitation to confess... "*Who told you that you were naked?*"--to be transparent...to trust the LOVE of their God. You see, God had decided beforehand--before Creation even--to come with true love and to restore his relationship with mankind. From Adam's perspective it was a promise out of nowhere, but it came from the heart of our God!

***"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."*** God promised that someone born of woman would step into the breach between God and mankind and would fix it, restore it, heal it! Forgiveness for sin!

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**APPROPRIATION** What IS sin? At its heart, sin is the belief that God is NOT enough—that God and his will are not enough. We must have more! WE must have "different"—what I want! But even deeper is the belief that God's will for us is not truly based on LOVE. "You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it you will be LIKE him, knowing good and evil. God is withholding blessing. He cannot be trusted. God doesn't truly love you!"

John Croyle believes his four statements to his kids are the keys of parenting—"I love you. I'll never lie to you. I'll stick with you till you're grown. And there are boundaries—don't cross 'em."

It is hard to disagree with John Croyle. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if this is NOT our goal in parenting, then don't have kids. In fact, if that is not our goal in parenting, then don't get married! For aren't those four statements KEY concepts for ANY relationship? "I love you. I'll never lie to you. I'll stick with you. And there are boundaries—don't cross 'em."

God led with those basic thoughts in the perfection of creation; he led with them again after the fall into sin. They are in his promise—and they are enough. Come and see!

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## **2. THE WILL TO SEE IT THROUGH**

### **A. From Heaven Itself**

Every once in a while a story comes along that causes you to pause and to be inspired. Such was the case in the unfolding of God's promise. It is one thing to MAKE a promise, it is quite another to HAVE THE WILL to see it through! God promised to send an offspring of woman to fix what was broken, to restore what was lost. And THAT is an amazing story indeed!

Next week Pastor Bonack is preaching on Cain and Abel; you will NOT want to miss that one. I don't want to steal any of his thunder but suffice it to say that Adam and Eve figure out pretty quickly that God's plan of an offspring to reverse sin's curse would NOT come from children born in the NORMAL way! Their children were as mired in sin as they were and in them was NO hope. A saving offspring would need God's intervention somehow! But no worries, God had the will to see it through.

John Croyle has some more godly wisdom pertinent to our discussion when he speaks about setting the right example for kids. "You've got to DO what's right; EXAMPLE outlives

advice. Children listen with their eyes. They don't listen with their ears." God had made a promise, and from heaven itself came its fulfillment!

*The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son; you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; his kingdom will never end."*

*"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

*The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."*

The Son of God was born a man—with a body and soul to pay sin's debt—but with the heart of God to love till the end! *"Father, if there is some other way for us to save them, take this cup from me. Yet, not my will but yours be done. Get up! Here comes my betrayer!"*

## **B. A Cross Meant to Kill**

One time John Croyle made a gutsy statement to that brother and sister whom we met with him at the truck stop—11 and 10 years old. They revealed to him some of the horrors they had been through before coming to the ranch. Without blinking an eye John said to them, "Remember the four things I told you when we first met? Well, I am going to add a fifth. No one will ever hurt you like that again!"

Pledging to step into the gap between evil and his children! Where did John Croyle learn THAT kind of love? Last week, the band at the Bridge sang this song that says it well, by a band called Crowder.

**You came for criminals...And every pharisee. You came for hypocrites...Even one like me. You carried sin and shame--The guilt of every man. The weight of all I've done...Nailed into your hands. Oh, your love bled for me...Oh, your blood in crimson streams. Oh, your death is hell's defeat. A cross meant to kill is my victory.**

A special kind of offspring is our Jesus! A special kind of love that sees it through come what may! Our sin, his death; his death, our victory! The forgiveness of sin! Inspiration to love and to restore as he has loved us!

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**APPROPRIATION** God wasn't playing a game when he promised to step into the gap between us and hell, us and sin's curse. From heaven he sent his Son with a promise. "I love you. I'll never lie to you. I'll stick with you till the end. And there are boundaries—don't cross 'em. But I will always forgive!" A promise with a destination...and the will to see it through.

**CONCLUSION** Dear friends, that is part of our Pentecost Potential: Restoration. God sent Jesus to model it FOR and to inspire it IN us. God's kind of love restores relationships and heals lives. Just ask 2000+ orphans who know the unexpected love of God through the unexpected love of one of God's man! I love you. I'll never lie to you. I'll stick with you till the end. Amen.

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