

June 8-12, 2020 Edition

The "Big Story" Of The Bible

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

Part 2: Creation- Why Us?

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;D) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we'll continue focusing in on the story of creation but we're going to switch gears a bit and ask the question, why us? Why did God bother to create us? Or anything at all? Other than the fact that He is a Creator (that's what creators do- they create. They can't not create although I suppose that to say God can't do something might not be a good idea although there are a few things He cannot do like lie or do something contrary to His own Nature but I'm digressing in the first paragraph and the experts say not to do that so I'll stop now).

From what I can gather from the Bible God created because He wanted a family to share eternity with. He chose you and me. We'll focus in more on that in coming days but I want to spend today once again looking at the opening words of the book of Genesis:

In the beginning God created... Genesis 1:1 (NLT)

Those words were written by a man named Moses. He wrote them in a time when few remembered their Creator. In the beginning we knew God well. He walked with us and talked with us and called us by name. So what happened? We chose to go our own way. We rejected God's offer of a perfect world where there was no pain or suffering or sickness or death. Why did we reject that, you ask? Because we think we know better. We still do. We still choose our own way over God's way most every day.

Every. Single. One. Of. Us.

And we have the option of discovering Who God is and what He is all about. And yet we still choose our own way so often. But the people living in the ancient world had very little idea of Who God is. Read the first 10 chapters of Genesis and you will find the story of mankind's sprint away from our Creator. Things got so bad there was this incident called the Flood (which we'll be looking at in a few weeks). Over time we lost all memory of our Creator.

So God decided to reintroduce Himself to us. He started with Abraham. He told Abraham that his family would become numerous and that all the nations on earth would be blessed through him. Abraham opted in. Abraham wasn't perfect. Neither were his descendants. Far from it. And yet God made Himself known once again through Abraham's family. And one day- several hundred years after Abraham had died- a descendant of Abe's sat down in the Sinai wilderness and wrote 5 words that would begin a movement and book that would alter the course of human history more than any other movement or book ever has:

In the beginning God created... Genesis 1:1 (NLT)

People in Moses' day believed not in one god but many. And the gods were not always good and kind and benevolent. They were often capricious and arbitrary and selfish and mean. So the people lived in fear of the gods. They engaged in superstitions to try to please the gods or to control the gods. They created fertility cults that had some truly horrible practices at their core. They worshiped objects like the sun and the moon. They believed that heavenly bodies, like stars, actually had influence over the affairs of human beings. Can you imagine people thinking something like that?

The humans who had strayed so far from their Creator believed the gods demanded terrible sacrifices. They sacrificed their flesh. They sacrificed their goods. They even sacrificed their children. It was horrific. People thought this world was all there was for us humans- that there

was nothing in eternity for us to look forward to. So we became petty, mean and constantly warred with one another (kind of like the gods we had envisioned after our own image). So God decided it was time to reintroduce Himself to us.

And so it was into this horribly destructive belief system, against this world view, the writer of Genesis one day sits before a scroll, and he writes in a single sentence: "In the beginning God (a transcendent, all-powerful, eternal, personal being) created the heavens and the earth." It was only seven words, and yet the world has never been the same.

We have access to a book that reveals the secrets of eternity. But more importantly- it introduces us to the God Who created us. It tells us Who He is, what He wants for us and why we were put on this earth. Maybe we could learn something from the humans that have gone before us making gods out of their own image and instead get to know the God Who made us in His own image.

Tuesday Reflection: Last week we looked at two different points to try to wrap our minds around the question of what the story of creation teaches us. The first was that this story that unfolds in Genesis chapter 1 introduces us to a God without rival. The gods that were imagined by the people of the ancient world were petty, mean and vindictive as we talked about yesterday but there was one other important quality that all the ancient gods shared- they had equally powerful rivals that often tried to frustrate their plans. The ancient gods were NOT all powerful. The ancient's stories of creation described battle and struggles between the gods. The gory aftermath became oceans, rivers, mountains, animals and... us. There are lots of ancient creation stories but they all pretty much share this one characteristic- there is no one all-powerful God. The gods were believed to exist in an uncomfortable stasis which any tip in the balance of power could end up with a battle that undid everything that we know.

Into this world view Moses writes a beautiful poem describing an omnipotent God who has no rivals. We have a rival that we will meet next week but Satan is no match for God. God's will is ALWAYS done with one exception- us. We have been given free will so God's plans are often frustrated because He refuses to force us to do His will. Love never forces itself on others.

Never.

Even when not forcing His will on us meant that one day His Son would have to die on a cruel instrument of execution dreamed up by the creatures He spoke into existence.

But even so the Bible points out over and over again- God is all powerful and He has no rivals.

And the second lesson we learned from last week's lesson on creation was that Jesus was there.

My old testament theology professor (Dr. Olbricht) was at the end of his career when I met him. He was mine and Judy's advisor at Pepperdine University and when he came to meet us and "advise" us on our schedules we thought at first he was the janitor or something. He was completely unassuming and looked pretty much like a country bumpkin. He was one of the most brilliant people I've ever known but it was tough to see it. He spoke in a monotone and had this dry sense of humor. Once when talking about "christological old testament theology" (find Jesus in the Old Testament) he said that Christological Old Testament Theologians find Jesus in the

Old Testament behind every bush and under every rock. I asked if that meant he wasn't a Christological Old Testament Theologian and he just looked at me and said, "I didn't say that..."

All that to say I'm not sure what Dr. Olbricht would think about my assertion that I believe Jesus is in the story of creation but I'm still going to say it. You'll find Him showing up in verse 3:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Genesis 1:1-3 (NLT)

Here in the first 3 verses of the Bible we are introduced to the Trinity. Now the word, "trinity" is not a Bible word. It's a word theologians use to try to describe this unique relationship between a God that is One but exists in 3 different somethings (how's that for taking a stand? The question of what to call the 3 different members of the Godhead (or Trinity) have caused wars, martyrs & church splits. I don't really care much what you call them. I just believe all three of them are in the scripture we just read. God the Father obviously. The Spirit is pretty obvious too but the Son? Where is the Son?

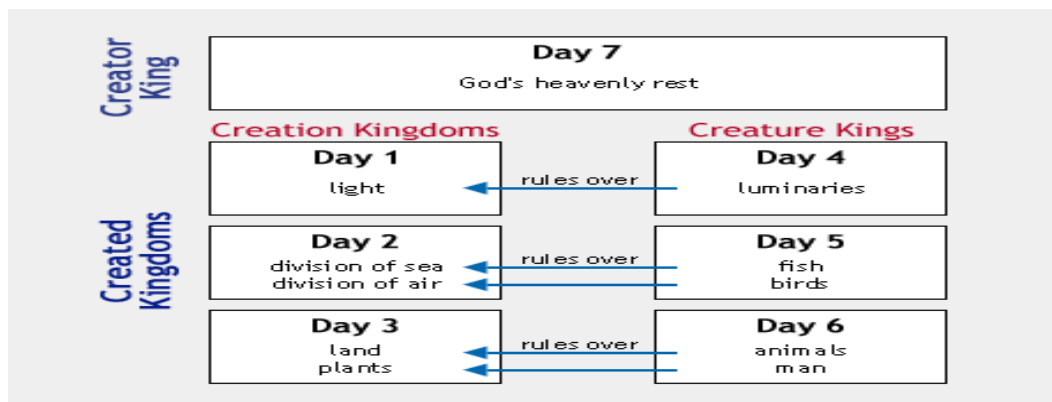
In the phrase, "Then God said". That's where Jesus is. We wouldn't realize it if the apostle John hadn't clued us in in the opening words of the gospel he wrote. Words which would have immediately reminded any Jewish person reading it of the first three verses of Genesis:

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. John 1:1-5 (NLT)

Jesus is the word. When God "said" (spoke), that was Jesus. I know it's difficult to wrap our brains around but that's the point of John 1:1-5- to make obvious something that isn't obvious. Jesus has ALWAYS been. He existed before Creation began and in fact was the mechanism or person through Whom Creation was achieved. In our year long journey to find Jesus in the Old Testament here is our first sighting.

Wednesday Reflection: Another lesson found in the story of Creation is that there is a pecking order to Creation. If you've been paying much attention to the stories in the life of Jesus then that might raise a red flag. I've talked over and over about how in Jesus' Kingdom there is NO PECKING ORDER. That's true. There isn't. Not in His Kingdom. But in Creation- there is a pecking order.

I don't know how much you've paid attention to the individual days of creation but I'm fascinated by the fact that in the first 3 days God creates the different realms of earth- land, sea and sky. Then in the final three days He creates "rulers" or "kings" (with a little "k") to rule over those realms. In other words on day one God creates light and then in day 4 He creates the luminaries- sun, moon and stars- to "rule" over the sky. In day 2 He creates the sea and the sky then in day 5 He creates fish and birds to "rule" over those realms. And then we see that on day 3 He creates the land and on day 6 He creates animals to rule over the land.



But He creates something else at the very end of day 6. He creates us:

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground." Genesis 1:27-28 (NLT)

God loves the earth and the animals and fish and birds He created. That is true. But God **LOVES** His humans. He has a special relationship with us that He doesn't have with the rest of creation:

Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person. Genesis 2:7 (NLT)

We alone in all of creation were created in God's own image. We alone had the breath of life breathed into us by our Creator. This is a difficult thing to say out loud in our culture where to say humans are somehow more important than any of the rest of nature will get you chased out of the room in many places. I'm not trying to say God doesn't care about the rest of creation. I'm not trying to say we shouldn't be taking better care of the earth that God gave to all of us to share and manage. I'm just pointing out there is a pecking order to creation. We'll talk more about that tomorrow...

Thursday Reflection: Yesterday we started a discussion looking at the pecking order in creation. Humans are at the top of that pecking order. The Bible affirms it over and over:

What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Psalm 8 (NLT)

We may be at the top of the pecking order but we are **NOT** at the top of **THE PECKING ORDER**. We are the only creatures (that we know about) that bear the image of God. But there is One

Who stands at the pinnacle of all creation although He Himself was not “created”. He has just always existed (I know- mind blown, right?):

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth... Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Colossians 1:15-18 (NLT)

This is another of those early Christian hymns sung in the earliest Christian churches. They are windows into what the earliest Christians believed about Jesus (and themselves as well). We read one of these hymns a few days back (John 1:1-5) which has a similar theme. Jesus has ALWAYS existed. Jesus IS God. EVERYTHING was created through Him and for Him.

Translation- Jesus stands at the pinnacle of Creation. He not only created it all (including us) but he also holds it all together (including us). He considers us to be so precious that He created us knowing one day it would mean that He would have to become one of us so that He could live the life we should have lived (but didn't) and then die the death that would have been our end if someone didn't save us so that He could share the reward that rightfully belonged only to Him.

Knowing all of that He created us anyways. Why? That's a great question. Why do humans decide to start a family? Don't ask us when our kids are in their terrible twos or when they're in middle school. And don't ask us when they're in high school either. But when things have calmed down as a parent why they wanted children and they'll say something like, “to share my life with. I wanted someone to pour my own life into. I wanted my life to be more than just about me.”

I think that's a pretty good explanation of why God created us. God created because He had a great dream of a perfect world where He could place his beloved children so that He could love and enjoy us forever and so that we could learn to love and enjoy Him forever.

Now don't get me wrong. God is not codependent. He didn't NEED someone to “complete him”. He didn't even create us to “worship Him” which is one theory I heard over and over growing up. That sounds more like those pagan gods we talked about on Monday. I remember as a kid singing a song in our hymnal called “I'll Be A Friend To Jesus” and I always thought it made Jesus sound like that loser kid that had no friends so his mom had to tie a steak around his neck so at least the dogs would come see him.

That is NOT what's going on here. What's going on here is that God wanted a family to share His life with. We are that family. And His greatest longing is that we would learn to trust Him and share our lives with Him as He shares His life with us.

Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love... He decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) Ephesians 1:4-5 (MES)

That is what God is up to human history. That is what God was up to with creation. That is why you and I exist. According to the Bible you and I are not just an accidental collision of random particles with no purpose or destiny. According to the Bible you and I are dearly loved children of God created to live in a reality of love and enjoyment. Didn't know you were that special, did

you? But you are. And so is every other human you have ever or will ever meet. So handle people (including yourself) with great care.

Friday Reflection: Finally creation teaches us that everything is connected.

Everything.

For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible...everything got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him. Colossians 1:16 (MES)

We are all connected to one another and to this creation. And the creation is connected to us (much to its chagrin). We will talk more next week about how it is because of our own mistakes that creation is now so messed up but we do need to at least acknowledge it today:

For all creation is waiting patiently... For on that day thorns and thistles, sin, death, and decay -the things that overcame the world against its will... will all disappear, and the world around us will share in the glorious freedom from sin which God's children enjoy. For we know that even the things of nature, like animals and plants, suffer in sickness and death as they await this great event. Romans 8:19-22 (TLB)

Again- we'll focus in on this aspect of the story of the Bible next week but notice how Paul points out that the creation is messed up because of us and I'm not just talking about humans not caring for the planet which we've given to share. Paul is talking about how our sin short-circuited not just our relationship with Heaven but it also short-circuited our relationship with the creation.

You know it's interesting to me that I grew up believing that the physical world was "bad" or "evil". That the spiritual realm was "good" and that one day when Jesus returned we'd jettison the physical aspect of reality and finally become purely spiritual beings that no longer had to deal with the issues that our physical nature causes.

It sounds all Biblical and stuff (a high falutin theological term) but it's not. I'm not sure where we got that idea but it wasn't from the Bible. Actually it's a concept rooted in Greek philosophy which Paul spends an awful lot of energy trying to shoot down. What the Bible teaches is that when Jesus returns to finally renew and restore everything He won't get rid of our physical natures but He will once again combine the physical and the spiritual parts of human beings and bring them into perfect harmony once again- the way it was at the beginning. We were physical and spiritual beings without the disconnect caused by sin and that is what we will one day be again:

And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ-everything in heaven and on earth. Ephesians 1:10 (NLT)

What will Jesus bring together? Everything. Not just the spiritual but everything that currently exists. It will all be brought together. A reunion to top all reunions. I can't imagine what that will be like. What it will feel like. I can't imagine but I can't wait. Somewhere we've gotten the idea that the physical world is "dirty" but I don't know when "dirty" became a dirty word. It's not even a four letter word- it's five letters long and dirty is what God became while creating us:

Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person. Genesis 2:7 (NLT)

When God finished creating us He had dirt under His fingernails. Isn't that an awesome picture? I have no idea what that must have looked like but... well no. There is no "but". I have no idea. All I know is that when God was done creating everything (including us) the Bible says this:

Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! Genesis 1:31 (NLT)

All of it. Very good. Not just good- VERY good. That includes me and you- our physical bodies as well as our spiritual selves. All of it was very good. So what happened? Ah- so glad you asked- that's what we'll look at next week.