



Today we begin “The Story,” the Bible as one continuing story of God and his people. We’re using these books as an aid to help us see the big story of the scriptures: The story of God actively working in the lives of humanity. The benefit of looking at the scriptures from this perspective is like the benefit of looking at a forest from an airplane. From a higher vantage point, you can see things you miss while walking a path. For example, the outer boundaries, the rises of hills and the dips of valleys, the creeks or ponds. Sometimes when you’re walking a path, you lose perspective of the entire forest. You might grumble about a creek crossing, you might fret about climbing a steep hill. In essence, your whole experience is defined by your immediate surroundings. But you’d have a more accurate understanding of your experience if you defined it with the larger landscape in mind. This is what reading through “The Story” will provide us.

We begin today with these words:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

This was “in the beginning” of what we understand as time. God “created,” *bara*, out of nothing. As God spoke, his words became his wonderful creations. He spoke and our world became. There was nothing and then there was. Imagine the power! In the description of his creation we see this power and we see that it was “good.”

And God said, “Let there be light” and there was light. God saw that the light was good (Gen. 1:3-4a).

And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” ... and it was so (Gen. 1:6-7b).

And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered in one place, and let the dry ground appear.” And it was so. And God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:9, 10b).

Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. And God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:11, 12b).

And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the

sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. And God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:14-15, 18b).

And God said, “Let the water team with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” ... And God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:20, 21).

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. ... And God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:24, 25).

And God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ... And it was so (Gen. 1:26-27, 30).

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good (Gen. 1:31).

Not only did his words become his creation, he describes everything he created as “good.” This means that everything in God’s creation was perfect, perfect harmony, perfect peace, perfect beauty, perfect relationships with one another and with God.

You and your friend are hiking in the Black Hills of South Dakota. As you round a hill, you come upon a sight that stops you in your tracks. In front of you are four giant faces carved into stone. Each head is as tall as a six-story building. The faces are a perfect likeness of four American presidents—Washington, Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt, and Lincoln.

After taking photos of this magnificent find, what conclusions would you come to concerning its origin? How did these faces appear on this mountainside? What reasonable options are there to explain it?

Perhaps they happened through chance. Over the years, wind and rock slides combined to produce these four faces. But that seems silly, doesn’t it? We know that Mount Rushmore exhibits the three signs of design: forethought, planning, and intention. Mount Rushmore is the brainchild of sculptor John Gutzon Borglum.

Limitation

In this perfect creation with almost limitless options, God gave one limitation.

And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Gen. 2:16-17).

It's like a goldfish living in a tank the size of the globe, filled with everything amazing and good, yet the goldfish will die if it jumps from the one opening at the top of the tank. It's tragic but this is the decision Adam and Eve made. Surrounded by the lavish provision of God, they choose the one fruit God forbade them to eat.

Many have asked, “Why give them the ability to choose this fruit? Wouldn't it have been better, really as an act of protecting them and all of humanity, to remove this choice from them?” This is a great question to ask and the answer provides insight into the character and heart of God.

You see, only humanity was given a choice like this. The sky, fish, animals or trees were not given such a choice. They simply exist. They do exactly what God designed for them to do. There's certainly something safe in this but it lacks something—relationship. God made one part of his creation “in his own image” so that we could be in relationship with him. Being in his image means we are moral creatures, having the capacity to know right from wrong. We are spiritual creatures with a soul. We are mental creatures with the ability to reason. We are relational creatures designed to live in loving relationships.

If God were to remove humanity's choice to love him, he would remove our ability to be in authentic relationship with him. Relationships always involve choice. To remove this would make us robotic. Ironically, the one part of his creation that would bring him the greatest joy, would also bring him the greatest heart ache. When he created us with the capacity to love him, he also gave us the ability to reject him.

Everyone knows what Adam and Eve did with their one limitation—they violated it. They eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and everything in God's perfect creation changed. Sin, earth and destruction entered God's perfect creation—tsunamis, earthquakes, wrinkles, abuse, war, suffering, worry, pain. All of these are the result of that one choice, the unraveling and destruction of God's perfect creation.

When people ask me about the so-called goodness of God while there is suffering in the world, I always talk with them about Genesis 1 and 3. God didn't create a world with suffering; Adam and Eve uncapped that bottle when they ate the fruit. If a person doesn't understand this, it's impossible to make sense of life: morality, love, pain or death. What we learn in Genesis 1 and 3 is foundational.

If a person will accept this explanation of God's perfect creation and man's corruption of it, the next question they ask goes something like this: If God loves us, why doesn't he stop this suffering?

Stop the earthquakes, the abuse, the diseases, the wars; stop it all, if he's all powerful?

To that I start by telling them that I agree with their desire for a pain free life. The suffering in our world and in our lives can be heart breaking. Imagine an existence without it! We agree with one another on that. Then I ask this, Where would you like to set the limits on God's intervening power and where would you like him to give the freedom of choice? Because if we want the pain and suffering to end in this world, God would have to override the desires of human hearts. This means he would have to take away our freedom of choice. He would have to make us robotic. I've never met a person who finds a robotic existence desirable. We all want the freedom of choice. But we mourn the suffering that comes with it.

This question gets us to the motives of God. God wants a relationship with us. A relationship, like every relationship we have, involves the freedom to choose to love or reject. God will not take our freedom of choice away because choosing him reveals our love. Instead of forcing us to choose him, God has been relentlessly pursuing people in loving relationship ever since sin entered into the world with Adam and Eve.

This is what makes God's story so unique. He's rebelled against, yet he works to redeem and restore the relationship. Notice how we see this when Adam and Eve rebel against him. Does he completely destroy them in an angry rage like a Greek mythological god? Does he turn a blind eye? Or does he punish the rebellion yet take the responsibility to right the wrong?

The big idea of this sermon is the Creator God redeems regardless of rebellion. He offers love when he's rejected. He bears the greatest cost of humanity's rebellion. This is **not** some kind of cosmic mathematical equation. God's redemption is deeply personal for him and deeply sacrificial. The God of the universe, filled with majesty and wonder and power, humbles himself to love rebellious people.

Let's look at three instances in these opening chapters of Genesis of rebellion and how God works to right the wrong and redeem the situation.

Rebellion #1—Adam and Eve Ate the Fruit

After they ate the fruit it says in Genesis 3:7:

“... the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked.”

Then God came walking in the garden looking for them. Think about this. God knows they ate the one and only fruit he forbid them from eating. By this one act they will completely corrupt his perfect creation and God comes walking in the garden looking for them. When he finds them, he doesn't chastise them or scream at them. He engages them in a calm conversation and you can feel his pain when he says in Genesis 3:13,

“What is this you have done?”

Instead of screaming as an angry parent, he quietly reveals his broken heart. He pronounces curses on the serpent, the woman, and the man. To the serpent (Genesis 3:14-15), you will be more cursed than any wild animal. You'll crawl on your belly, eat dust, and there will be enmity with the woman. To Eve (Genesis 3:16), you will experience severe pain in childbirth, and your desire is to rule over your husband. To Adam (Genesis 3:17-19), work will be very difficult.

Redemption is foreshadowed when God says that Eve's offspring will crush the serpent's head. Protection is offered in Genesis 3:21—God made garments of skin for them. And in Genesis 3:23-24 God banished them from the garden and placed an angel and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life.

God is working to redeem and protect, regardless of the rebellion of Adam and Eve.

Rebellion #2—Cain Killed Abel

Did Adam and Eve's children learn from their mistake? Did they listen to mom and dad telling stories around the fire at night and resolve to never mess up as badly as they did? No. In a jealous rage Cain killed his brother Abel. God responded with a curse and an act of protection.

The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

But the Lord said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden (Gen. 4:10-16).

Instead of wiping Cain out for killing his brother, he gives him the room to choose to love him. He protects his life and sends him to a new land. Under his protection, God gives him the option of redemption.

Rebellion #3—Human Hearts were Only Evil All the Time

Did humanity learn from the mistakes of Cain, Adam and Eve? No. Fast-forward in time and there are lots of people; very rebellious and wicked people.

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:5-8).

What a heartbreaking section of scripture. Instead of using their freedom of choice to love God, humanity chose to reject him. The result was a curse—the destruction of almost every living being on planet earth. The protection was upon Noah, his family and two of each animal. So God sent a flood that covered everything and when everything was dead, the waters receded. Noah, his family and the animals exited the boat.

Then God said to Noah, “Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it” (Gen. 8:15-17).

Noah is so grateful for God's protection that ...

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done (Gen. 8:20-22).

Noah expresses his gratitude with a burnt offering and God promises to never destroy all living creatures with a flood again.

Do you see the Big Idea? With the rebellious acts of Adam, Eve, Cain and all of humanity, God works to offer redemption. Redemption means “the action of saving or being saved from sin, error or evil.” Notice how God is saving people from their own actions. Redemption also means “the action of regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for payment, or clearing a debt.”

The grand narrative of the entire Bible is God's story of making the payment for rebellious people. It's such a central theme that God reveals it from the opening chapters of the Bible and he never stops telling his story of how he is redeeming people.

This is such an important theme because it's a unique theme. It's a theme that defines the boundaries of our relationship with our Creator God. It reminds me of the Chilean miners who were trapped in a collapsed mine back in 2010. In the fall of 2010,

billions of people around the globe were captivated by their story. Trapped beneath two thousand feet of solid rock, the 33 men were desperate. The collapse of a main tunnel had sealed their exit and thrust them into survival mode. They ate two spoonfuls of tuna, a sip of milk, and a morsel of peaches every other day. For two months they prayed for someone to save them. On the surface above, the Chilean rescue team worked around the clock, consulting NASA, meeting with experts. They designed a thirteen-foot-tall capsule and drilled, first a communication hole, then an excavation tunnel. There was no guarantee of success. No one had ever been trapped underground this long and lived to tell about it. Now someone has.

On October 13, 2010, the men began to emerge, slapping high fives and leading victory chants—a great-grandfather, a 44-year-old who was planning a wedding, a 19-year-old—all had different stories, but all had made the same decision. They trusted someone else to save them. No one returned the rescue offer with a declaration of independence: “I can get out of here on my own. Just give me a new drill.” They had stared at the stone tomb long enough to reach the unanimous opinion: “We need help.

We need someone to penetrate this world and pull us out.” And when the rescue capsule came, they climbed in.

The book of Genesis was written by Moses and delivered to the Israelites as they wandered in the desert after their deliverance from slavery. So God rescued them from slavery—he redeemed them. Then what did the people do? Pretty quickly they rebelled against God by worshipping a golden calf, doubting God and grumbling to Moses about God’s dumb plan. After all of this God inspired Moses to write Genesis for them to remind them that regardless of your rebellion, God is working toward your redemption. You sinned, yes. But that doesn’t have to be the end of your story.

For us personally, we can relate to that, can’t we? We sin by committing rebellious acts and thoughts. And God is working toward our redemption too. We know that this was ultimately expressed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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