

1/24/2021

Sermon Series: The Big Picture

Genesis 1:27 NLT

So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Genesis 2:7-9; 15-18; 21-23a; 25 NLT

⁷ 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.

⁸ Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. ⁹ The Lord God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...¹⁵ The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. ¹⁶ But the Lord God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— ¹⁷ except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die." ¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."...²¹ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man. ²³ "At last!" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh!"...²⁵ Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

The Big Picture: Creation

All right, my friends, we are beginning our new journey through the whole entire Bible! As we take a 30,000 foot view of scripture, our goal is to see and understand the overarching story of the most important book on earth. But before we dive into our today's scriptures, let's explore this idea for a moment, this idea of the story of the Bible, or "the Biblical narrative" as people who are much smarter than me refer to it.

Ok, what's interesting about how the Bible is compiled is that we call the Bible a book, right? Right. But what do we call the things in the Bible that have names like Genesis, Exodus, Psalms and so on...books!

So...which is it? Is the Bible one book or is it a bunch of books? Both. Yeah, but wait, there's more to what makes the Bible perplexing...These books that make up this one Book don't even come from the same place or time or person. What? These many books (and there are 66 books in the Bible) are written from different civilizations, spanning across hundreds of years, and by many different authors (well, human authors, that is). But the series of books in the Bible are not like the Harry Potter book series who mainly follows just one character, young Harry, as he experiences the trials and thrills at Hogwarts while learning how to be a wizard. No, the Bible is about all sorts of *different* people who lived in different times and places, and the accounts are written by many different people. And so, how on earth do these 66 books even begin to belong together in this one Book we call the Bible?!

Well, while at first all this can seem preposterous, what's absolutely amazing is that these 66 books actually do belong together! It's astounding, really! Although these books were written in different places at different times by different people spanning hundreds of years, these books truly do

create one big – I mean *gigantic* story! In fact, it's the biggest, most important story ever, ever told. *And* to put the cherry on top of the mind blowing-ness of all this...the story's not over. There's a big, "To be **continued...**" that is still currently happening. And you and I are a part of that story – right here, right now. Alongside Adam and Eve, Moses, David, Ruth, Peter, Mary, and Paul, the stories of your life and mine are found in this story we call the Bible. This Biblical narrative has a beautiful and peculiar way of telling the story of humanity while also telling the story of each one of us – where we've come from, where we are, who we are, what we're made for, and where we're going. The Bible's story says all of that – both about all of creation and about you and me.

And of course, with every good story... there must be a "**Once upon a time...**in a land far, far away..." Well, the Bible's way of saying "once upon a time" is, "In the beginning..." I just love that those are the very first words of the Bible, don't you? It feels so exciting! I love the sound of cracking open a new book or hearing the beginning credits of my favorite movie play – and these very first words at the beginning of the Bible give me that same anticipatory, "what's gonna happen next?" kind of feeling.

"In the beginning..."

Now as you might have noticed, the scriptures that Jim/Dina read for us earlier were not these first words...today we're skipping over those verses, but if you've never read through the first chapter of the Bible, the whole first chapter is actually giving a 30,000 foot view of the beginning of creation. There's this beautiful, poetic way that the chapter one of Genesis tells us about how God created the heavens and the earth and the moon and sun and stars and everything on the earth. There's this rhythm to it. It goes like, "God said let there be _____ and God saw that it was good." There's beauty and creativity and order all throughout that first chapter of the Bible. Even if you've read it before, go back and read it again sometime this week just to hear the rhythm to it. It's beautiful.

But let's particularly focus on one aspect of creation today – us – humanity. In that zoomed out, 30,000 foot view, that Genesis chapter one describes, we have just one little verse that describes the creation of humans – just one! Genesis 1:27: "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Hmm...Uh...hello...that's it? "So God created human beings..." Can we get some more details here? ...Well, of course if we keep reading into the second chapter of Genesis we will get more details. But before we move on to today's other scripture reading, let's focus on

that verse from chapter one for just a moment because there's more to it than first meets the eye.

“So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” This verse, while it's just the one verse in the first chapter of Genesis that we get about the creation of humanity – really says so, so much. We men and women together are reflect God's very image!

Now, it's easy for us to read that and think, “yeah yeah, old news, so what?” But the book that we're using as our guide through the story of the Bible (which is called “The Story of God, The Story of Us”) gives us an example of how this creation story is remarkably different from the creation stories that other ancient civilizations told. The sacred text of the Babylonians, called the **Enuma Elish**, tells of gods who fought so much for the right to rule over and be served by the other, loser gods that finally the king of the gods, named **Marduk**, created humans for the sole purpose of being slaves to the gods so the gods wouldn't fight anymore. These gods in the Babylonians' creation story are not good to humans, making them do strange and evil things to please the gods. Those poor Babylonians who believed they were only created to be slaves to gods who ridiculed them.

Thanks be to God (our one and only God) that the truth of creation is not so ugly and terrible as what the Enuma Elish describes. **The God of the Bible** creates men and women in his own image, placing upon us dignity, beauty, honor, and authority. And it's in the second chapter of Genesis that all of this is expanded upon.

What I love about Genesis 2 is that it's like the Bible zooms in for us, **from this big picture** of the whole world – down into the nitty gritty space where you and I exist, here on earth. **For a long** time when I read these first two chapters of the Bible I thought chapters one and two of Genesis contradicted each other or at the very least the second chapter was just being repetitive...**but really it's much** more like this zoomed out version and zoomed in version of the story of creation. The first chapter is needed to tell the story and so is the second.

Chapter two of Genesis shows us the details of humanity's creation story, and this second chapter is no less beautiful than the first. While the first chapter had this poetic rhythm to it with the words, "God said let there be...and it was good," chapter two describes God creating man and woman in the beautiful Garden of Eden where they were free to live in close relationship to one another and to God. It's in this garden that God gives

the first man and woman **three gifts** that also show us what it means to be human. These three gifts are: purpose, permission, and prohibition.

The general, **human vocation** (or our job, calling, purpose) is to join God in caring for *his* creation, the world around us, and also for us to create, too, by making and caring for children. Now you and I have other jobs that can be considered subsets of those callings, but in the grand scheme of the world, our purpose is to care for God's creation and care for the beings that we also help create.

The second gift that God gives humanity is permission. This Garden that the first humans get to live in holds endless possibilities. They are free to enjoy this land to their hearts content. And the key word there is "free." God gives humanity *freedom* to do as we wish, to make actual choices that could and do have lasting outcomes.

Which leads us to the **third gift**: prohibition. What? Prohibition? How can that be a gift? Well, if you really think about the second gift, freedom, to have true freedom of choice, for our "yes" to actually have meaning, there has to be the possibility of a "no." As *The Story of God, The Story of Us* says, "**God has given** us everything that is necessary for life. But if our freedom to enjoy God's generosity is to be meaningful, we have to have the

possibility of disobeying God.” Yes, prohibition is a gift because it’s only with prohibition that we truly have freedom.

Aren’t we just like those first humans when we read this beginning part of the Bible? God does all this creating, gives humanity everything for living and thriving – including freedom of choice – and yet it’s so easy to focus on that fruit on tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on the *one thing* amongst the rest of creation, that we’re told we shouldn’t take. Oh we humans...we’re all alike.

Think of it this way...Say you take your kid, your grandkid, or your best friend’s kid to the grocery store for a sleepover shopping spree – you’re allowing them to pick out anything they want to enjoy while they stay at your house overnight – like anything. But before you let them go pick out whatever they want, you let tell them that they **shouldn’t get ice cream**. The child’s parents reminded you that they’ve just discovered that their child has developed a lactose intolerance, particularly in the way ice cream is processed. “No problem,” you think, “There’s plenty of other foods to enjoy.” But when you tell the kid the news about the ice cream, they say, to you as you’re going into the store,

“No ice cream?”

“Right,” you answer, “but you can have anything else in the entire store!”

“Why can’t I have ice cream? My favorite ice cream is chocolate brownie fudge.”

You say, “Well, let’s go look at the chips...what’re your favorite chips? Doritos, Cheetos, Fritos, Tostitos...oh, what the hey, we’ll get all the chips! How’s that sound?”

“Are you sure I can’t get ice cream?”

“Yes, your mom said your tummy will hurt.”

“My tummy won’t hurt too bad. I’ll be fine.”

“Oh, I know!” You say, “let’s go see if we can find chocolate fudge brownies!”

“It’s not the same as chocolate fudge brownie ice cream. I can practically taste it now. Where’s the freezer section in this store?”

That’s us...we humans want what we shouldn’t have. These gifts of purpose, provision, and prohibition that God gives us are precious and powerful, but even in chapter two of the Bible...even here in our story of creation, we can sense something else is coming because even as you and I read Genesis two, we still tend to focus on the prohibition more than the gifts of purpose and freedom.

And because this story, this ancient text from so long ago, tells our story, too, God has given us these same gifts he gave the first humans. Adam and Eve's blessings are the same as ours – we get to create with God every day, we have the freedom to enjoy life and thrive, and we also have the gift of choosing whether or not we will follow God's wisdom in the prohibitions we come up against every day.

We have been created in the image of God to create with him, to care for his creation, to thrive, and to be free. That is the beginning of our story...how will it turn out? **You'll just** have to come back next week to find out...

Let's pray --