

META | Creation

INTRODUCTION

Grab your Bibles and open them to **Hebrews 12**. I hope everyone had a great Christmas. I hope everyone got their rest, because we have some work to do here today.

We will be starting a new sermon series called, THE META. In the next 5 weeks, I am going to attempt to preach through the Bible front to back. You may ask yourself: why would someone attempt this? Good question. My hope for this series is that we all get a stronger understanding of the story of the Bible, the great meta-narrative (that's where the title comes from). This is important, because I believe too often we talk about submitting ourselves to God's plan rather than conforming Him to ours, but in reality we have no framework for doing that.

The way that we see the things in the world, called our worldview, is built out of our understanding of how the world works. Each and every one of us has a perspective on the facts of life. When we disagree or conflict with someone on a specific issue, our initial reaction is to cast off their point of view. We do this because we can't see it the way that they do. This is where the saying:

don't judge a person until you have walked a mile in his shoes comes.

It is the acknowledgement that you cannot truly understand the perspective of another person until you have lived their story. That ultimately is what we are talking about. We like to think of ourselves as pretty smart folks, who can sit and weigh the facts and figures and give a fair and imbalanced judgment on truth. But in reality, we are all fickle, emotional, we are all reactionary... the way that we make decisions and weigh truth is based on our story: what we have seen and what has happened to us.

In our culture, the differences in our stories is praised as diversity. It is seen as a badge of honor to follow your story. To allow your own personal view of the world to take you where it will. The truest and most complete you and I will ever be is in embracing our story and living it to its fullest. You can see where this line of reasoning leads:

1. If your own personal story is the basis for your reality.
2. Your meaning and purpose is rooted in that reality.
3. It would be wrong for anyone to ever make a judgment on that reality.

This is the world we live in. Where not only does each person have the ability to create their own reality, but no one is allowed to question that reality. This is what we call absolute relativism, and it is most often fought under the banner of tolerance. The danger of this new tolerance, is it provides no basis for morality or ethics. Morality and ethics depend on an absolute to defer to, and by making all things relative, it makes it impossible for anyone to ever say anything is wrong.

What we see happening in our world is that we still want to see good overcome evil in our society, but we have taken away the reasoning for it. We have decided that individual expression is the most important attribute and then hope that it will work out well for the community as a whole. But those two things do not go together. If someone is supposed to be all about themselves then you cannot expect them to all of a sudden be selfless when the situation calls for it.

It is foolishness, but it is a foolishness that most of us believe at least partially. We all want to say: NOT ME, but even that response come from a self-dependant sense of your own importance. It sounds like Peter telling Jesus: *Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.* That didn't really work out very well for him.

When Peter speaks here, and when our internal voice comes to our defense, what is happening is we are viewing Jesus as a character in our story: I won't be weak like those other people, I will hold to the truth...but if you knew the truth, what you would know is that you don't actually have the ability to be stronger than, better than, smarter than everyone else. You wouldn't stand up to God and flex your muscles and proclaim your greatness. You would not stand at all.

This is the greatest difficulty of our worldly existence: we don't know how to get over ourselves. Even when we come to God, we want to come on our terms. We want Him to help us build our kingdom. We demand that He fit into our story.

In order for us to relate to God, we must come to understand how we fit into His story, which begins with actually knowing the story. This is why we are going to study the story of Scripture from start to finish. It is THE STORY. Because we make sense out of our life by means of our story, our life can only be transformed by replacing that story with a better story. The drama of Scripture is not there to tweak little inconsistencies and give us a justification for our pursuit of being a good person. It exists to change us completely.

As the calendar turns over this week, I have gone ahead and made a new years resolution for you. In 2013, we are going to read through the Bible together as a church. To do this requires each of us to make a commitment, to be disciplined, but it also requires us to have a broader view of Scripture to place our reading into. Otherwise Bible reading becomes an exercise in looking for God to give us helpful tidbits to steer us through our story. The Bible then becomes fragmented and detached from both its main theme and character. Reading the Bible in this way not only depreciates its value, but it may steer you away from God entirely. As one author puts it:

A fragmented Bible may actually produce theologically orthodox, morally upright, warmly pious idol worshippers!

This is the danger we face. Coming to God on our terms will provide us with a God who we comfortably coexist with. Entering into God's story allows no easy transition. Which brings us to our text for today, **Hebrews 12.28-29**:

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

I love the book of Hebrews because it does such an amazing job of framing the OT in light of Jesus Christ. The author here lays the structure from which we can begin to tell God's story. He says God's story is about two things (remember these because we will be referring back to this over and over again):

1. Kingdom: God's reign over the entire world. Each and every part of the story that God has written for His world reveals the fact that he is in complete control over it. Our verse tells us that the kingdom that cannot be shaken has been given to us. We have no part in creating it, controlling it, or making it valuable or somehow devaluing it; what we do is receive it; in this we should be grateful, and we should respond in worship.

2. Covenant: relationship between a holy God and fallen humanity. The verse refers to God as an all consuming fire. It is impossible for sin to come into contact with God, it will be burnt up by His holiness. In order for God to bring people to Himself, He must make His people holy.

The Bible tells us the story of how God plans to bring about His absolute rule and reign as well as how He is going to make an undeserving people part of it. The story is written so that we will come to know God and worship him. God's story unified, but it is not simple (as anyone who has

attempted to just pick up the Bible and read it cover to cover knows). Much of its complexity comes from that fact that God is no ordinary storyteller:

1. His story is built into human history. God tells His story through real events and real people. The story is told through real lives and through real pens. As we understand the inspiration of Scripture, God breathed out His Word through human beings.

2. His story is complex in literary form. Narrative, law, prophecy, poetry... God is not talking to us like a children's book. He uses big words, big concepts, and He allows us to see Him in beauty and power. God is trying to describe Himself to us, it is no wonder He has to tell His story in so many different forms. He is trying to help us to grasp His complexity: *reverence and awe* of who He is.

3. His story builds on itself. But as it does, things don't go away, they become bigger. God reveals to us, then reveals what that actually meant, and then shows us how what we thought was only part of the story. We need to experience the story in this building, revealing way if we are ever going to truly understand our part in this story. God's story is not finished. He has already shown us what the end will look like, but it hasn't happened yet. What this means for us is that we are characters in the story of God. Understanding the scope of the Bible helps clarify for us what this part is.

THE FIVE ACT PLAY

The story of the Bible is very much like a 5 act play. I would suggest that this is because God created us to understand stories in this way, it was only a matter of time before writers figured out that this was the best way to formulate a story so that the readers could best understand and organize the thoughts. In a five act play, the story is broken up so that the story can have its appropriate arch:

1. that characters and scene can be properly developed
2. the conflict can be fully explored
3. the drama can be built
4. the apex of tension can be reached and relieved
5. the conclusion, working out what this all means

The Drama of Scripture unfolds in five acts this way:

act 1 | CREATION: introduces characters/scene, sets up the rules for the story

act 2 | FALL: conflict enters into the picture

act 3 | REDEMPTION INITIATED: God begins to act, reveal His character

act 4 | REDEMPTION FULFILLED: God's plan reaches its focal point and the cross relieves the tension

act 5 | RESTORATION: we see God working to bring His creation to full restoration

That is our outline for the next five weeks. Today we tackle act 1: CREATION. We begin in Genesis 1.1. You ready!

CREATION

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Now we said that the purpose of Act 1 was to create an agenda for the rest of the story. To give us characters and scene. Right here in the first two verses we are given a character and a scene. But what we see is that this is no normal story. In the character of God we see the He is creator.

Before there was a scene, God already existed. He creates the scene. He creates the story. This seems simple, but think of the implications of this. It means that while God plays a role in the story, He also exists apart from it as the author. As the author, He has the right to do with his characters whatever He chooses to. **Romans 9.21-23** states it clearly:

Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—

This is speaking specifically of how God has chosen to write His story, with salvation for some and hell for others. When we hear this or read God's response to Job's questioning, we tend to think of God as mean. But the judgment of unfair that we place on Him, comes from the fact that we believe in our sense of justice, which does not hold up if He is the author of everything. As a matter of fact, how hypocritical is it of us, who are hyper-relativists, who refuse to make bold declarations of what is right and wrong, to all of a sudden have a clearly defined objective position from which to raise our fists and tell God that he is unfair – as an argument it doesn't hold water.

The world does not exist without Him; there is not story without Him. Not just in a 'the world needed someone to create it sort of way,' but there would be no reason for it to exist apart from Him. He creates the world for Himself...for what? FOR HIS GLORY.

The next question you should be asking is: how does he receive glory? In Genesis 1, we see that God creates the world:

1. Day/Night
2. Heavens/Earth
3. Land/Seas
4. Trees
5. Animals

Then on the sixth day God creates human beings, the pinnacle of his creation (1.27-28):

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

God creates people in the image of God. He instills upon human beings the distinct ability to respond to and reflect the glory of God. We have been given the distinct ability to enjoy God and worship Him. God has given us the unique ability to bring glory to Him in the created world. We do this by being image bearers.

God gives Adam and Eve a clear picture of how He wants us to bear image: have dominion. What God is doing is placing one part of His creation in a place of authority over the rest of creation. He is saying that we are not just animals, we are created to rule over this earth as stewards. We take care of what is God's. As human beings, we have this freedom and responsibility. Freedom to have a relationship with God, to respond to His commands, and to enjoy the creation as a manifestation of God's glory. We also have responsibility to be accountable for

how we respond to this freedom. God has chosen to work through human beings to establish His Kingdom. He uses His creation to reveal His absolute sovereignty.

So that is Genesis 1, God creates, He sets the scene, then He creates the characters, man and woman, and places them as the upholders of His glory here on earth.

And then we come to Genesis 2, and it retells day 6 of creation in a bit more detail. Genesis 1 is world-centered. It shows how human beings fit into the greater creation. In Genesis 2, God shows us how we are to relate to one another and to Him.

This chapter begins with God forming man out of the clay and breathing life into him. Everything else had been created by the Word of God, but here He was taking an active role in the form. He was getting His hands dirty. He was specifically present. We must never downplay the specialness with which God loves people. He has taken extra special care of us even from creation.

God then plants a garden for the man. It tells us in v. 9:

Out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

Here's where my inner art nerd is going to come out a bit. The world that God created was created, we see here, to appeal specifically to the senses of human beings. God creates us, with the sense of sight, taste, smell, and hearing, and then He creates a world that appeals to these senses. God cares about beauty and created a world that would reveal His beauty to us. The scene we set in the garden is ultimately a backdrop for the coming savior, but it is also designed for our enjoyment. God made fruit to taste good and to ferment into wine. He created the inside of cows to taste like steak. And the most amazing part of it is when it was created, IT WAS GOOD. There was sweet fruit without diabetes, there was wine with no alcoholism, and red meat without cholesterol. No one was gluten intolerant. It was pleasant and it was good, and what made it perfect was the fact that God was present. He was there, in relationship with His people.

We see God's further care in the creation of Eve. God creates for Adam a helper suitable for Him. Once again, because He created Adam, he knows exactly what Adam needs, and so He puts Adam to sleep, and once again forms for him a wife. He takes the woman and presents her to Adam. Now as much as the world was created for the enjoyment of Adam, he had never seen anything like what God was now giving to him. So Adam looks at her and praises God, saying (v. 23)

*This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."*

She is like me but different, Adam says. She is from me and for me. She is, the perfect compliment. A gift that could only be given by God. If God had asked Adam, what do you want me to create for you? his mind would not have had the capacity to come up with something so wonderful. Only God knew what He truly needed, and even more amazingly, God gave her to Him. The story of creation ends with a picture of paradise (v.24-25):

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Here are Adam and Eve, in a beautiful garden that God created for them, with all the food they could ever want provided for them, with a clear purpose, to cultivate the world, and here they are able to enjoy it all without the shame and guilt of sin. This is the freedom of being made in the image of God, but as we said before, this freedom is balanced by responsibility. Adam and Eve were able to enjoy this life and this God freely, but there was an aspect of responsibility to this freedom. For us to be in the presence of the creator God requires a covenant relationship.

God lays out this covenant, called the Adamic covenant, in verse 15:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

This is the covenant that God makes with Adam as the representative for all people:

1. You have the responsibility to image me in working and having dominion over the earth. (this is a repeat of what we saw in chapter 1).
2. You get to enjoy the beauty of creation, including the woman who I have created so that you can enjoy relationship as I have relationship in the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).
3. You must obey me as God. The one rule that I will give you to maintain this relationship, creator and creation, is that you must abstain from eating of the one tree in the middle of the garden.
4. You will be held responsible if you break this command. You will surely die.

This covenant is the basis for our relationship with God. He is holy and He is the author. We must then relate to Him as the holy author. Refusing to do this, would be like the characters in the story (not the actors) refusing to play the part that the author gives them. In an actual story this is not possible, because the characters do not have the capability of rebelling against the author. When the author writes something down, it is set in stone...it is what it is. This is the magnificent part of God's story, He gave the characters Adam and Eve the ability to go against the author. As we have said they had freedom and responsibility.

And so the tension is set: we have our scene, our characters, and our scenario. God creates. He creates a good world. He creates human beings as the crowning achievement. He places these people in a beautiful garden, where they can enjoy the goodness of God and rule over the world as image bearers. They are limited by one command, God's authority is simplified to: do not eat of the one tree.

What this world needs, what you and I need, is a proper relationship with God. It is in submitting ourselves to Him and allowing Him to be God that we can be the reflectors, the image bearers, that we were made to be. The story of the Bible is how God makes a way for His people to have relationship with him, and it starts here in Genesis as God creates us in relationship with Himself. Lays down what that relationship requires. We have all failed to live up to the requirements of this covenant, we will look at the downfall of that next week. But even in that, even as the relationship between us and God is severed, he is still working to create a way for you to be with Him. In Jesus, perfect submission is lived out. Jesus lives the life that Adam was created for. He makes it possible for us to once again live without the guilt and shame of sin, enjoying the creation, and ushering in the Kingdom of God in full glory, through the telling of what Jesus has done.

So we celebrate the reality that God not only created us, but He created us to be with Him. And we receive Communion in anticipation for the day when we will experience this relationship fully.