

B90 Series #1

Covenant

Genesis 12:1-9

INTRO:

We have begun to know the Bible better in 2019, with the Bible in 90 days program. Even if you are not participating . . . you are, because my message texts will be from the reading for the week. If you *are* reading the B90 program, this will reinforce your reading, as will the Wednesday night study. We remembered last week that we cannot know there really is a God or not . . . unless God reveals himself to us. And God has and continues to reveal himself to us through his Word.

This week we will focus on God's story beginning with the goodness of **Creation** and moving to the **Contamination** of that goodness by sin in the garden of Eden and finish with God's response in his **Covenant** with Abram.

Let's pray for God to open our eyes to himself this morning...

A. From Creation . . .

GOD:

Genesis 1:31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

WE:

Someone said that '*It is a part of the history of creation that God completed his work and (saw) it as a completed totality.*' By his grace his creations are granted not only the creation itself but a heaping measure of self-determination. And if the details of his creation were pronounced '*good*' the whole thing is very good. The Hebrew Bible and the New Testament both affirm this in their call to a *grateful* and *thankful* acceptance of all things material as both **from** and **for** God. Here is an example from each side of the Bible:

Psalm 104:24 (CEB): Lord, you have done so many things! You made them all so wisely! The earth is full of your creations!

1 Timothy 4:3 They will prohibit marriage and eating foods that God created—and he intended them to be accepted with thanksgiving by those who are faithful and have come to know the truth. 4 Everything that has been created by God is good, and nothing that is received with thanksgiving should be rejected. 5 These things are made holy by God's word and prayer.

Creation was good. God even said so, *and he should know!* Then the goodness of creation was contaminated by the human he had treated and were included in the very Good creation.

Think for a moment about the mysteries of just one of God's creatures—a whale. These big, beautiful creatures spend 95 percent of their lives in the ocean, one of the deepest and darkest places on earth. And without warning, they pull 30,000 pounds of blubber against gravity and leap out of the water for unexplainable reasons. Some baby whales gain 100 pounds an hour while nursing. The song of a humpback whale, lasting for 10-20 minutes and being repeated for hours at a time, is produced for no apparent reason. Biologists speculate it may be related to mating, but truthfully no one is quite sure. The reason they breach the surface of the water is also a mystery. **For show? For mating? For fun?** There are speculations, but no one really knows why.

Watch them for a second and you feel helpless, out of control; not the terrible kind of helplessness, but the beautiful kind where we feel small and God feels big, and the mysteries of the world are acceptable to be unexplained. Awe and wonder...

A writer tried to describe his sense of awe as a huge finback whale swam underneath his ocean vessel:

In that one motion, my entire presence is undermined. I feel, rather than see, this eighty-foot animal swimming

below. Knowing it is there tugs at my gut, and something inside makes me want to plunge in and dive with it to some unfathomable depth where no one would ever find us.

B. We move from Creation to Contamination . . .

GOD: Genesis 3:1-6

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’ ” 4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate

WE:

They say that Satan fooled Adam and Eve into thinking that good lay just beyond evil, that wisdom could be obtained even by disobedience, that the avenue of greed would lead to greatness. That’s because Satan was, and still is, so good at warping the truth. He had told them they would **not** die, and they didn’t die at that moment physically, but they were immediately subject to a spiritual and eternal death. This means separation from the goodness of God.

Sin is a means nothing except in relation to God. A Calvin and Hobbes comic strip illustrates this in an disarming way.

Calvin, a little boy, is hurtling down a snowy slope on a sled with his friend Hobbes, a tiger, conducting a discussion about sin (the wildly improbable nature of this scene is part of its charm). Here is the dialogue:

Calvin: I'm getting nervous about Christmas.

Hobbes: You're worried you haven't been good?

Calvin: That's just the question. It's all relative. What's Santa's definition? How good do you have to be to qualify as good? I haven't killed anybody. That's good, right? I haven't committed any felonies. I didn't start any wars. ... Wouldn't you say that's pretty good? Wouldn't you say I should get lots of presents?

Hobbes: But maybe good is more than the absence of bad.

Calvin: See, that's what worries me.

C. And God responds with the Covenant . . .

GOD: Genesis 12:1-8

Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."⁴ So Abram went, as the

Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8 From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. 9 And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

WE:

The history of redemption, like the history of creation, begins with God speaking. This distinguishes Abram's story from his father's. The call to forsake all and follow finds is like what we see in the Gospels. Abram's early history is partially the story of his progressive separation from country, kindred and father's house. This a process was not completed until the end of chapter 13.

The Torah is the first five books of the Bible. The Torah does not share the story just to teach about ancient history. Its aim is to teach religion and heritage. It uses ancient tradition for this purpose. By carefully choosing its words, the Torah signals to the us key relationships within the ancient tra-

dition that show its meaning. Already in the first section of chapter 12 it is possible to recognize this. Abram comes up out of the north and passes through all the land of Canaan in three journeys. In the first journey he goes to the place of Shechem and there he builds an altar to the Lord, marking the “ideal conquest” of the land and its sanctification to the Lord. In the second journey he arrives on the east of Bethel, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. Again he builds an altar at this place and calls on the name of the Lord.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

God Created and it was good, it was Contaminated by sin, and God responded by Covenant

CLOSE:

Where's Jesus in all this? As a young Christian, pastor and author Tim Keller said, **"I found the Old Testament to be a confusing and off-putting part of the Bible."** But while he was at a study center someone asked the great Bible scholar Alex Motyer a question about the seeming disjointedness between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Keller writes:

*I will always remember his answer ... Dr. Motyer insisted that we were all one people of God. Then he asked us to imagine how the Israelites under Moses would have given their **"testimony"** to someone who asked for it. They would have said something like this:*

We were in a foreign land, in bondage, under the sentence of death. But our mediator—the one who stands between us and God—came to us with the promise of deliverance. We trusted in the promises of God, took shelter under the blood of the lamb, and he led us out. Now we are on the way to the Promised Land. We are not there yet, of course, but we have the law to guide us, and through blood sacrifice we also have his presence in our midst. So he will stay with us until we get to our true country, our everlasting home.

Then Dr. Motyer concluded: "**Now think about it. A Christian today could say the same thing, almost word for word.**"

My young self was thunderstruck. I had held the vague, unexamined impression that in the Old Testament people were saved through obeying a host of detailed laws but that today we were freely forgiven and accepted by faith. This little thought experiment showed me, in a stroke, not only that the Israelites had been saved by grace and that God's salvation had been by costly atonement and grace all along, but also that the pursuit of holiness, pilgrimage, obedience, and deep community should characterize Christians as well.

Let's pray to the God of Abram together now . . .