

Creation – Covenant - Consummation

From the sermon series: This Is Our Father's World

Text: Genesis 1:1; Ephesians 1: 9-10

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Transcription of the spoken sermon

My message this morning introduces a new theme which will be with us for a few weeks, and what I want to say, in dealing with the doctrine of Creation and the early chapters of Genesis which are so foundational for all the rest of scripture, is that this is our Father's world, and our lives have meaning and purpose because they are rooted in reality, a reality that is embraced in the sovereign and gracious God. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and that statement from the Apostle Paul is rooted in that kind of conviction and goes on to say that in the fullness of time God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and is moving all things toward a point of consummation when He will realize the purposes of love with which He created in the first place.

Creation, the whence from which we come; Consummation, the whither toward which we are moving; and in the meantime, a God of Covenant Grace and love Who calls a people into being to witness to the larger world about His creative intent and His consummate purpose. God, the Eternal God, calls us as His people to be His witnesses to a drama of cosmic dimension, of eternal scope. And I want to say to you in a very pastoral way this morning that, in thinking about the doctrine of Creation, what I would like to have you go out of here with is a sense that your life is plugged in and has a part in a movement that has meaning and purpose; that in the chaos of our lives which can so often be the case, there is a deeper order and foundation, for the Eternal God is our Refuge and underneath are His everlasting arms, and He is moving all things toward the realization of His purpose of love, which is to bring all things into a beautiful harmony in Christ.

I don't know the dimensions of that beautiful harmony in Christ, or just exactly what it means that He will unite all things in Jesus Christ, but it would seem to mean at least that all of the various dimensions of our human existence and the created order and the movement of history will become something beautiful, and that even now we can begin to rest in the assurance that the Eternal God is moving things along from that beginning point at which He said, "Let there be..."

to that end point when he shall say, "Let time be no more," and all things come into the full expression of His loving intention. And so, this morning we have a great word from Paul who assures us in the midst of our days, in the midst of history, in the midst of the kind of history which we have experienced again this week with hostage-taking, terrorist actions, encounters in the sky – in the midst of a crazy, bizarre world like this – we can be sure that there is Someone Else, something else of ultimate reality, of purpose, of love, and a goal that will be realized one day, somehow, because God is God. In the administration of the periods of time, the Eternal God Who began it all is bringing it toward an end in which we will say with Him Who said it at the beginning, "It's very good." That's the message.

Not everybody believes that. Sometimes we take these biblical truths as truisms and the familiar almost become clichés that lose their cutting edge. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Doesn't everybody believe that? In the end, "the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ." Doesn't everybody believe that? Can't you take that for granted?

No, you cannot. Not in our day and our world. For example, sometimes a word on the opposite side can make that biblical truth sharper. An example is a statement by Eric Fromm, the psychologist, behavioral scientist, a very profound thinker and excellent author. In his book, *Man For Himself*, he says there is only one solution to his problem, to the human problem: to face the truth, to acknowledge his fundamental aloneness in a universe indifferent to his fate. To recognize there is no power transcending him, which can solve his problem for him. Eric Fromm is saying, "Brother, Sister, you are alone. There is no one else. There's no other dimension. There's no place to call, no one upon whom to trust. You are on your own."

Now, I can identify a little bit with Eric Fromm. He is a psychologist who deals with human personality and he probably sees a lot of people who use religion as a crutch, who can't face the harsh realities of life and use religion as an escape. That's weakness. That's not healthy. And there are times when I would like to say to some people, "You must grow up. You must take responsibility for your life. God calls you to be responsible. Don't blame it on the Devil, and don't wait around for God. He calls you to be a responsible person." Perhaps some of that is behind Eric Fromm's statement.

Yet it also expresses what he really believes, or what he really does not believe, and he really does not believe that there is another reality, there is a personal reality, that there is a purposeful intention in Creation moving toward consummation. He says, "You are all alone and the only meaning there is in life is any meaning that you can create. The only love there is in life is the love you can generate. There is no one else. There's nothing else."

Well, the French thinker, Andre Maurois, says this: "The universe is indifferent." He said, "Who created it? Why are we here on this puny mudheap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea, and I am quite convinced that no one has the least idea."

That's the opposite from the Apostle Paul. He simply said, "I don't know why we're here, and I don't believe anyone knows why we're here on this puny mudheap spinning in infinite space." Reflective of a good deal of sophisticated thought in our day.

In his inaugural lecture in Cambridge University, the historian, G.N. Clark, wrote, "There is no secret and no plan in history to be discovered. I do not believe that any future consummation could make sense of all the irrationalities of preceding ages. If it could not explain them, still less could it justify them."

It's the other side of the pole. The irrationalities, contingencies, the universe as an accident - an accident going nowhere, with no reason or no purpose, with no goal. That's the opposite side of the pole of what the Apostle Paul said in our text.

Remember Dag Hammerskjold, the former Secretary General of the United Nations who was such a deeply spiritual person? He understood what Paul had to say. He wrote this -

God does not die on the day that we cease to believe in Him, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by a steady radiance, renewed daily of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.

Hammerskjold knew better than to argue for the existence of God, but he did say with a kind of serenity that is rooted in some experience of that reality, "God does not die on the day that we cease to believe in Him, but we die on the day that our lives cease to be illumined by a ... radiance, renewed daily of a wonder ... beyond our human reason."

The Apostle Paul knew what he was talking about. He believed that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and he did not believe that the unraveling of time and space was simply an accident, that life was living itself out and reality playing itself out and the cosmic drama on its way just willy-nilly, meandering hither and yon, going nowhere; but rather he believed that the God Who in the beginning said, "Let there be ..." is the God Who through the periods of time continues to administer, to direct and to guide in a way that is beyond our comprehension toward a point of consummation where there will be a realization of His purposes and we will be able to join with all the hosts of heaven and say, in affirmation of what He said in the beginning, "It is really good!"

The first chapter of Genesis is simply the proclamation that the Creator creates Creation. It is the proclamation, it is the article of faith that states that all that is, is because the Eternal God, the Sovereign and Gracious God, said, "Let there be

..." That's really all it says. It says that all that is, is because He said, "Let there be ...", and it is not interested at all in science, it is not interested at all in portraying the history of how that happened. It has no interest in technique. As a matter of fact, this chapter is not as old as the second chapter, which is a companion account of the Creation.

But this chapter was probably penned in about the 6th Century B.C. and was addressed to the Exiles in Babylon, who were wondering about their God as over against the pagan gods of Babylon (since they were a conquered people and Babylon was the dominant power): wondering about the comparative worth of their God against Babylon's god; wondering whether or not they ought to switch loyalties, trade allegiances; wondering, in the alien land and alien environment, where God was and whether now all of the purposes and promises of kingdoms and of the exaltation of Mt. Zion and all of that which made them what they were, whether all of that now was down the tubes; and wondering whether that put an end to the possibility of faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In that community, in the midst of its chaos, in the moment of its darkness, when its faith was faltering, when its worship was withering, this word came written by some priest or prophet, we know not whom, saying, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the pagan deities of Babylon are but the inventions of the mind and hand, but the God Whom you worship is present in this your judgment and will be present in the greater Grace."

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Trust the Creator Who has made Himself known as your Redeemer and Who will redeem you yet again.

This chapter is a proclamation. It is a theological statement; it leaves all the room in the world for whatever science can come up with, and all of the unfortunate debate over the centuries between science and religion is needless. And of that debate we should be heedless. Unfortunately, in our day, in the courts even today Evolution and Creationism are being battled and you can bet that whoever is arguing for Creationism in the courts of this country is not a friend of biblical religion. It is a benighted kind of obscurantism that does great harm to the cause of truth. But people get exploited in their fears and don't fully understand the nature of this biblical word.

This word about Creation was the proclamation to a people in trouble that they could trust their God in the darkness, that He was indeed the Author of Reality, He Who said, "Let there be ...", then let it be and gave Creation elbow room and room to develop. He Who is the Sovereign Lord Who brought all things into being also created the space and time where that created order could develop. He Who is Sovereign is not coercive. We're going to see that in those early chapters. He Who could, figuratively speaking, snap His fingers and control the winds and the world doesn't deal with Creation that way. Rather than coercing, He evokes response, He elicits love, He pleads, He waits, He anguishes, but He will never

abandon nor forsake, and He will wait and love until finally He conquers with grace. He will have His way.

This first chapter of Genesis says that all of reality is graced. Three times over He blessed the created order. The grace of God that is right in the structure of reality – in the morning the sunrise, and in the evening the sunset, in the magnificent chords of the harp and the anthems and in a landscape resplendent with October colors, in the fact that the body heals itself and there's human relationship, and there is community – in the whole of everything there is Grace. All of reality is filled with Grace.

And beyond that, it is the proclamation of the God Whose fatherly care will sustain and keep us so that we can celebrate "This is our Father's world." When we pause in so simple a moment as table grace and simply bow our heads and say, "Dear Lord Jesus, be our guest and to Thy service may these gifts be blessed," we are acknowledging that there is a deeply rooted Grace in the whole of reality that for us who are His people has been manifested fully in the face of Jesus. We can say with the Apostle Paul, "'Thanks be to God Who has created space for us to be and Who has loved us and continues to woo us, never crushing us or overpowering us, but never abandoning us until finally one day He'll bring us home and we'll look Him in the face with unveiled face, and we'll say, 'It was really good.'"

Let us pray.

O God, Whose artistry is able to weave sunlight and shadow, pleasure and pain, victory and defeat into a tapestry that spells love, we bow in wonder, love and praise, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.