

Creation's Goal: Sabbath Rest

From the summer sermon series: Faith's Foundation

Text: Genesis 2:2-3; Isaiah 65:23, 25; Revelation 21:3; 22:2-4

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Transcription of the spoken sermon

On the sixth day God completed all the work He had been doing, and on the seventh day He ceased from all His work. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy...Genesis 2:2-3

They shall not toil in vain or raise children for misfortune... they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord. Isaiah 65:23,25

Now at last God has His dwelling among humankind! Revelation 21:3

... the leaves of the trees serve for the healing of the nations. Every accursed thing shall disappear. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there and His servants shall worship Him; they shall see Him face to face. Revelation 22:2-4

In the beginning, God. And in the end, God. And in the meantime, every seven days, the Sabbath in which to rest and to contemplate the God of our end and of our beginning.

In the midst of its history, Israel told its story over and over again and finally wrote its story down - the center being the story of God's mighty act of deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, the freeing of God's people, and the bringing of them to their own land. As they reached back to trace their own history, they appended to the story of their history a prologue, the story of the Patriarchs. And then, in order to connect themselves to the whole cosmos and the whole human race, they appended a series of stories in which they gave expression to their understanding of the universal human condition and the creative purpose of the Eternal God, of the relationship of God and human society, of their understanding of the life and the existence in which they were participating. Genesis 1, "In the beginning, God," expressed the bedrock of their conviction that all that is, is because God said, "Let there be ...," that there is *something* rather than nothing because God said, "Let there be...," and that the totality of reality is a consequence of a creative intention and design of the One

true and eternal God. They went on to speak of the human situation - the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden in chapters 2 and 3. Not a story of two ancient individuals, but your story and my story, the human story, the story of the God Who calls us to vocation, grants us freedom, sets certain limits and boundaries and waits for our response. Genesis 2 and 3 tell us that the tragedy and the tears and the toil of the human situation are the consequence of the human creature usurping sovereignty, taking one's life and destiny into one's own hands, trying to manage and control that which only God can manage and control. Consequently, the disaster and the tragedy that is a very real part of the human situation.

We looked last week at the Garden of Eden and the story of Adam and Eve, and we saw the setting and the test and the failure and the consequence, but even in that dark story there were hints of grace. Even there there were indications that God was not through, and that the disobedience of the creature would not finally disrupt the intention of the Creator. In the day that they ate thereof, they did not die. Driven from the Garden, to be sure, yet amidst toil and tears, carrying on a meaningful existence, raising a family, God graciously clothing them, covering the shame of their nakedness, giving us hints of grace and the sense that God was not through with this creature, and that the creature's disobedience would not finally disrupt the Creator's intention. Indeed, the sense we get is that the Creator will bring creation to the consummation of His original intention.

That was the faith of Israel. That was the conviction of the Old Testament people of God. The Creator will bring creation to the realization of the Creator's purposes of love and grace.

So, Israel appended these stories to its own history, these stories which had universal application and were the common store of all humanity. Israel appended those stories in order to give expression to its own understanding of who it was and what it was called to be and why the human situation was like it was.

When it seemed to be all lost at the end of the third chapter, we have the hints of grace, and we ask ourselves, "What now? Where will it lead? What's going to happen? What's next? Who will win - the 'No' of the creature, or the 'Yes' of God?" And we set ourselves up for this breathless drama that will unfold before us.

Well, it's not only an ancient question, you know. Is there any hope? Has history any meaning? Is the world going anywhere? What's it all about? What now? What next? In a year of election politics we're going to have many easy answers to the world's dilemma. If you'll pardon just a bit of pastoral cynicism in the wake of a political convention, let me ask the question whether there's anyone here this morning that really thinks that either Michael Dukakis or George Bush can really change the intransigence of the Pentagon. Is there anybody here this morning that really believes that Gorbachev and *perestroika* and *glasnost* will change the

face of the Soviet Union? Is there anyone here this morning that believes that the hopelessness of the homeless and the hunger of the hungry and the thirst of the thirsty, the despair of the despairing and the lostness of the forsaken will simply be taken care of by the wave of the wand of a new administration? Is there any hope? Where is it going? Where will it end? Might not one, seriously reflecting on the human condition, on the national scene, on the international prospect, come to a sense of futility and hopelessness? And if that's true in the most powerful nation in the most affluent society, in the summertime in western Michigan with sand and surf and blue sky, then what must it have been to the people in exile in the sixth century, the people of Judah living under the oppression of Babylon ready to throw in the towel, ready to say that the gods of Babylon have it? Where is our Lord and God? Is there any hope?

It was to that situation that some person of God stood up and said, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and God spoke and it was so, and God looked and said it's good, and the evening and the morning were the first day. And when God was done, God rested from all His work of creation and took delight in it. He blessed the seventh day and made it holy." And to those exiles in Judah, forlorn and despairing in hopelessness, mantled with a sense of futility, they heard the creed of creation put together by some very, very astute weaver of words and ideas which made a powerful statement in their darkness and said, "Our God in the beginning spoke and called all things into being. Our God is the source of light and our God is the source of life. Now, lift up your hearts and wait on the Lord, Who after all of the work of creation, rested, ceased from His work, caught His breath, contemplated the work of creation and said it is good."

By putting that seventh day, a day in which God created nothing but tranquility and serenity and peace at the conclusion of the creed of creation, the writer was saying that in the end God will have His way. Genesis 1 was written probably 500 years after Genesis 2 and 3. Five centuries later some prophet of God took it and put it in front of Genesis 2 and 3 in order that Genesis 2 and 3 and everything that followed would be read in the light of Genesis 1, "In the beginning, God," so that there would never be any question in the minds of the people of God that the God that they worshiped was the God of Creation, that the God of their salvation was God alone, the One Who held the whole world in His hand and held their destiny in His hand and in His heart.

There was a vision of the Creator Who would bring creation to consummation. That's what Sabbath meant, and that's why every seventh day Israel was called again and again to remember God, to cease from their labor, to desist from their acquisition and their feverish activity, to let go and contemplate God and to worship and to rest and to take delight in God's world. There was a vision by which that people lived through all their days, and in their darkest moments a dream kept them alive. It was the dream of the Creator Who was the redeemer, Who would be the consummator. And what was the dream? Well, around the

same time that Genesis 1 was written there was a prophet speaking to the exiles in Judah who said, "In the name of God, behold I create a new heaven and a new earth, and the former things will not be remembered. And there will no longer be a child born living for a few days, dying in infancy. And they'll not toil in vain. They'll build houses and live in them. They'll plant vineyards and eat the fruit thereof. It's going to be a beautiful new world, a new heaven and a new earth. Why, he said, it will be such that all toil and all tears and all tragedy will be removed and they'll not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. Shalom. Peace."

Right in the midst of their darkness, one prophet said, "In the beginning, God," and another prophet said, "I create a new heaven and a new earth." It didn't come, and it didn't come, and it didn't come. But, one day Jesus came, and Jesus announced the sovereignty of God, the kingdom of God. And Jesus called to repentance all of those who were living by relative values, called them to God and the kingdom of God. Of course, Jesus was crucified, but God raised him up, raised him up on the first day of the week, and the Early Church moved its worship from the seventh day to the first day, but with exactly the same intention, because they called it the Lord's day, the *Lord's* day. In the Old Testament the day of the Lord was the day of the End, and what the Church was saying was that the Lord's day is the anticipation of the day of the Lord, of the End, of the Judgment, of the Consummation.

What did they believe would be true at the End? Well, we read the magnificent vision, that vision given by Jesus to John when he was in exile for his witness to Jesus when the Roman Empire was mighty in the world, as mighty in its world as the U.S. of A. in ours, or the Soviet Union in our day. And when the persecuting fires of Rome were burning and raging, there was one who had the audacity while he himself was in exile, to bear witness to a vision he had, a dream. What was the dream? The dream was of the heavens opened and the throne of God and of the Lamb, and he heard them singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty, Thou art worthy to receive power and glory and dominion, for Thou hast created all things, and Thou hast power to reign." And the vision went on, scene after scene, and he saw that time when the angel would proclaim the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. He saw all of the events of the consummation coming to their climax and he heard a voice out of heaven saying, "I create a new heaven and a new earth," and he heard a voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with human persons. And he will dwell with them and they shall be His people and He will be their God. And He'll wipe away every tear from their eyes, and pain shall be no more, nor crying and death shall be no more, for all the former things shall pass away. Behold, I make all things new." And then he saw the City and he saw a river sparkling like crystal coming down the midst of the city, and on its banks was a tree with leaves and the leaves were for the healing of the nations. And the throne was there, the throne of the Lord and of the Lamb and His people worshiped. He wrote His name on their foreheads, and they didn't need the sun or the lamp, for the Lord Himself is their light, and they shall reign forever and ever.

A dream. A vision spoken into the darkness, spoken into circumstances that seemed to deny it, into a human situation that seemed to betray it over and over again, but a dream and a vision, nonetheless. Every seventh day, people of God cease from their labors, let go, rest as God rested, receiving the world and life as a gift, all of grace, being free for each other, free for God. One seventh of a human person's existence given over to the contemplation of God, Creator, Redeemer, Consummator. One-seventh of our lives carved out in order amidst all of the pressures that press upon us and all of the forces that beat us down and all of the darkness that would enshroud us, one-seventh of our lives to stop, to be still, and to know that He is God, the God of the beginning and the God of the End, the God Who will make good on all His promises, the God Whose yes is stronger than any human no. The God before Whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess, the God Who will finally win and not be defeated. When we join with myriads and myriads and thousands of angels and the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders and the whole created order and sing, "Hallelujah, the Lord Omnipotent reigns."

There's a parable at the beginning; there's a parable at the end. There's a garden at the beginning; there's a city at the end. And both of them point us to the deepest, most profound truth that we can ever come to contemplate: the God of our beginning will be the God of our end. That's why every seventh day there is nothing more wonderful than resting in the presence of God. The day of all the week the best, emblem of eternal rest. Alleluia, blessed be His holy name. Amen.