

## ***The Drama of Scripture***

### ***Creation (Part 1)***

Alasdair MacIntyre tells an amusing story that I've adapted for our purposes this morning (see *The Drama of Scripture*, pp. 17-18). What would you think if you came into this room, sat down, and you overheard the woman sitting behind you say, "The scientific name of the Harlequin duck is *histrionicus, histrionicus*"? You would probably be confused, right? That statement can't be understood in a vacuum; it can only be understood in the context of a larger story. Consider three possible stories that would make that statement comprehensible:

First, perhaps the woman person sitting next to her was the person she saw yesterday in the library who asked, "Do you by chance know the Latin name for the Harlequin duck?" Her statement would then make perfect sense.

Second, perhaps the woman had been seeing a therapist in hopes of overcoming her extreme shyness. The therapist had given her the assignment of talking to a complete stranger. When she asked, "What should I say to a complete stranger?" the therapist said, "Anything at all." She just said what came to mind.

Third, perhaps the woman is a foreign spy who thought that the person sitting next to her might be her contact. The protocol is for her to say, "The scientific name of the Harlequin duck is *histrionicus, histrionicus*," to which her contact would respond, "Of course it is!"

The point is that the meaning of a statement can only be understood in the context of a larger story. The same thing is true of ***our lives***. If we want to make sense of our lives we need to understand the story in which we're living. We could begin on a personal, biographical level, asking, "What is the story of my family? How have I been shaped by my experiences and my education?" If you want to go deeper you might ask, "What is the story of my culture or country? What are the ideas and experiences that (for good or bad) have shaped the way I think and feel and act?"

If we want to go deeper still you need to ask, "Is there a true story of the whole world, for all of humanity? Is there a grand, overarching narrative that explains the story in which I find myself?" Or as Michael Goheen puts it, "Is there a real story that provides a framework of meaning for all people in all times and places, and therefore for my own life in the world?"

As you know, different people (and faiths) will offer a number of different "stories" or narratives for human life. Some would say that we're only an accident of nature and that nothing awaits us after death; therefore as long as you do some good in this life it doesn't really matter how you live. Others would say that we're involved in an endless cycle of reincarnation; the good or the bad you do will determine your next incarnation. Others would say that God "grades on the curve," that if you do enough good in this life you might just earn your way into heaven after you die.

The Bible also has a distinctive narrative, a true story that explains the history of the universe, its present state, and its future. The plot line of the Bible can be viewed as a drama with four acts: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. We are going to take two weeks to consider each of these acts.



This week and next we'll talk about **creation**, or more specifically, God as the Creator. Then we'll take two weeks to discuss the **fall** (which is symbolized by the apple minus a couple of bites; we'll talk about the rebellion of humanity and the fallout in our relationship with God, with each other, and with the rest of creation. Then we'll take two weeks to discuss **redemption**. The vast majority of Scripture describes this "act" of God's drama, how He set out to redeem all things, first through Israel and ultimately through Jesus. Finally we'll take two weeks to talk about **restoration**. This is probably the most neglected aspect of the drama of Scripture. What we'll see is that God has promised to restore all of creation (not merely humanity) to its original purpose. The Bible begins with God creating the heavens and the earth and ends with God remaking all things so that there is a new heaven and earth.

Our (somewhat ambitious) goals for this series are:

1. *Provide a grid for reading and understanding Scripture.* As you understand the plot line of Scripture, we hope that you are able to understand the pieces better. If we read a verse or passage from the book of Leviticus or Isaiah or Matthew without an idea of the larger story, we will probably misunderstand what that passage is saying. Hopefully this series will help our reading and understanding of Scripture.
2. *Increase our confidence in the triune God.* Since "the Bible is about God," the drama of Scripture is fundamentally about God. Our faith should greatly increase if we believe that God is the good Creator of all things, that He didn't give up on humanity

after the fall, but that He put into motion a plan through Israel and then through Jesus to redeem all things back to Himself, and that He will one day establish a new heaven and earth that will fulfill everything He desired for the first creation. We'll see this morning how the Scriptures move from theological truths **about** God as Creator to very personal experiences **with** God as Creator.

3. *Help us "find our place in the biblical story."* [That's a phrase taken from Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*.] The drama of Scripture gives us a grid for understanding our own lives and circumstances: abundance, suffering, time/aging, money, our own bodies, relationships, etc. Instead of seeing the details of our lives as insignificant spiritually, we see them in light of what God is doing in the world. This should give us purpose and energy in walking with God through this life, confident about what awaits us in the future.

With those goals in mind, today we consider the first act in the drama of Scripture: Creation. Please stand (if you're able) as I read Genesis 1:1-2:3. This is God's word: [READ Genesis 1:1-2:3.]

In Genesis 1 consider three foundational truths about God as Creator.

First, **God is the Creator of everything and everyone.** (*Genesis 1:1-2, Revelation 4:11, Psalm 24:1-2, Job 1:20-22*)

Notice again that God is the subject of the first verse in the entire Bible.

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

By saying that "God created the heavens and earth," Moses is saying that God created **everything**. The expression "the heavens and earth" is repeated at the end of the creation account (in 2:1), confirming that everything described in between has been created by God. And so, Genesis 1:1 declares that "in the beginning" (at the beginning of time as we understand it) God created everything.

Moses is establishing that everything and everyone **must** answer to God. As the Creator of everything and everyone, there is nothing beyond His power or outside of His jurisdiction. The entire creation must answer to the Creator. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

I want us to see how the Scriptures move from the (somewhat) abstract idea that God made everything and everyone to a very personal experience with God as Creator. For example, when the book of Revelation describes a scene with creatures worshipping before the throne of God, we read this burst of praise (Revelation 4:11):

11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

As the Creator of everyone and everything, He alone deserves our worship. Scriptures such as Romans 1 will lament how humanity has turned from worshipping the Creator to worshipping the created. We see examples of this throughout Scripture: people

worshiping idols made of wood and stone, kings (such as Nebuchadnezzar) demanding that people bow down and worship his image, nations worshiping the sun and the stars. Scripture makes clear that because God is the Creator of everyone and everything, He alone is worthy of our worship.

In Psalm 24 David give another implication of God as Creator:

1 The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains,  
The world, and those who dwell in it.  
2 For He has founded it upon the seas  
And established it upon the rivers.

Because He is the Creator, He is also the owner of everything and everyone: the earth and all it contains, including those who dwell in it. Since God owns everything, we own nothing. As we'll see later, we are placed in this world as stewards, managing resources that really belong to God. This is implicit in passages such as 1 Timothy 6. There Paul encourages contentment by reminding us, "we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either."

Someone who understood (perhaps better than anyone else in Scripture except Jesus) that God is Creator and Owner of everything was Job. After Job and his wife had experienced unfathomable loss (children and wealth), Job responded to God this way (Job 1:20-22):

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." 22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

You don't worship God after disaster strikes unless you really believe that He is the Creator, and therefore Owner, of everything. God has every right to give **and** to take away. We would do well to imitate Job and personalize the truth that God is the Creator of everyone and everything. Until we worship God as Creator, we will never find our place in the biblical story.

A second foundational truth about God found in Genesis 1 is:

**God's creation is "very good."** (*Genesis 1:4, 1:10, 1:12, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25, 1:31, James 1:17*) Verse 2 tells us that God shaped an earth that was "formless and void" (it lacked "form" and was empty/void).

2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Basically he was saying that the earth was uninhabitable for humanity (see Jeremiah 4:23-27). The subsequent account in verses 3 through 25 stresses that God transformed the earth into a place that was suitable for humanity. Over and over we read that God spoke "and it was so."

- He provided lights in the heavens
  - He separated land and sea
  - He cause the earth to produce vegetation and fruit trees
  - He brought into existence living creatures in the air, on land, and in the sea
  - As we'll discuss more fully in a few minutes, He created humanity in His own image.
- Six times in the creation account we read, "God saw that . . . it was good." At the very end of the creation account we read:

31 God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

This is a very basic, foundational truth: God's creation is "very good." The goodness of creation reflects the goodness of God (and many other attributes - see Romans 1:20).

One implication of this involves **creation care**. Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 both mention that God has entrusted His good creation to the care of humanity. We'll talk about this more next week when we look at Genesis 2, but the basic idea is that we are to care for creation in a way that is compatible with the goodness of God in creation.

There are also implications for **the rest of "the drama of Scripture."** The fact that God's creation is "very good" means that after "the fall" redemption and restoration will include creation. It would be strange if God's entire creation was deemed "very good" and yet His remedy targeted only the souls of humanity, leaving the rest of creation mired in the the devastation of sin. We'll see in a few weeks that the drumbeat throughout Scripture is that God will make "all things" new again. We read in Romans 8:19-22 that creation longs for the day that the children of God are revealed (at the return of Christ) and that creation itself "will be set free from its slavery to corruption."

There are implications for the essential nature of humanity and the nature of salvation after the fall. Some religions teach that physical is bad and spiritual is good, that the goal is to escape the material world (including our bodies) and enter into some spiritual realm. By contrast, the Bible teaches that we were created as embodied beings; our bodies are part of the creation that God pronounced as "very good." Therefore, if our salvation is to be complete, it **has** to include the redemption and restoration of our bodies. Repeatedly the New Testament tells us to "glorify God" with our bodies and that we will be given resurrection bodies at the return of Christ.

A third foundational truth about God found in Genesis 1 is:

**God created humanity (male and female) as the crown of His good Creation.**  
(Genesis 1:26-31, Psalm 8:3-8)

We read about the creation of humanity beginning in verse 26. Several details suggest that humanity is the crowning feature of creation. Whereas the living creatures were made "after their kind," humanity will be made "in God's image" (essentially after God's kind). Whereas "**the earth** brought forth vegetation. . . and living creatures," **God Himself** created man and woman.

26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

This verse is among the most studied and written about in the entire Bible. And rightly so: this verse establishes the fundamental identity of humanity. These verses establish our relationship to God and our relationship with the rest of creation. The emphasis in these verses is upon the intimate connection between God and man.

Scholars debate the significance of the plural pronouns in verse 26: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness . . .” God could be addressing the heavenly court; He could be using the royal plural; or it could be a veiled reference to the Trinity. Perhaps the most helpful observation is that just as God speaks of Himself in the plural, He will speak of humanity created in His image in the plural: He will create man (singular) “male and female.” The image of God will be exhibited most fully in relationship. In light of what is revealed about God in the New Testament, we can reasonably conclude that the relationship within the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is reflected in God creating humanity “male and female” (this is the emphasis of Genesis 2).

The term “image” denotes a physical representation of something. An image is always something that you can see. When God made man, He was making a representation of Himself that people could see. “Image” is the common word for idols (often “molten images”). Surely part of the reason God prohibits making idols that represent Him (as in the 2nd commandment) is because He has already placed His image in creation. It’s as if He has said, “If you want to see what I am like, look at My people.”

27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

As image-bearers, we are to “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth.” This is more than a command to have babies and spread out; it’s a command to spread God’s image throughout the earth. It foreshadows the promise to Abraham (“through you all the families of the earth will be blessed”) and the great commission (“make disciples of all the nations” - among every grouping of people). The command to “subdue” or “exercise dominion” (ESV) reflects the perspective that God is the Lord/King over all of creation and that we are his “royal stewards” (Chris Wright, p. 34) who have the responsibility of ruling over creation in a way that’s compatible with our Creator King.

We’ll talk more about this next week when we consider Genesis 2, but I want us to notice how David marveled that humanity is the crown of God’s creation. In Psalm 8 David took phrases and concepts from Genesis 1 and prayed this prayer to God:

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,

The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;  
4 What is man that You take thought of him,  
And the son of man that You care for him?  
5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God,  
And You crown him with glory and majesty!  
6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;  
You have put all things under his feet,  
7 All sheep and oxen,  
And also the beasts of the field,  
8 The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,  
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

For David, our exalted position in creation is cause for humility and worship. Being “made in the image of God” wasn’t merely an abstract theological truth for David. It helped him “find his place in the biblical story”: God has assigned him/us to be stewards who would compassionately rule over the rest of creation. That fact humbled him to the core and prompted him to worship. He ends the psalm the way he began:

9 O Lord, our Lord,  
How majestic is Your name in all the earth!