

In the Beginning...God

Genesis 1

November 16, 2008

I. Introduction

a. Novels

- i. What's your favorite book? How does it start?
- ii. Only two ways to begin a novel:
 1. With the setting
 2. With the protagonist – the main character
- iii. *Tale of Two Cities*
- iv. *To Kill a Mockingbird*
 1. Page 9: start of movie

b. Bible

- i. Story begins with the protagonist
- ii. Look at the verbs throughout the account. All pointing back to God as the actor.
- iii. God hovered, God said, God made, God blessed, God said, God made, God said, God made, God blessed.

c. *The Canon*

- i. NY Times science columnist: Natalie Angier (p. 243).
- ii. Story is about the setting. The action is done by the stuff.

d. The truth about beginnings

- i. There are only two ways to tell that story, that story that starts with those three words: "In the beginning."
- ii. Either a story about the setting or a story about the protagonist.
- iii. Unfortunately many Christians get so concerned about the secular attack that they think our job is to create a story on their terms, a Christian story about the setting. But that undoes the whole point of the thing.
- iv. The biblical account isn't about the stuff, it's about the hero of this book: *In the beginning...God*

II. 3 truths about God

- a. So what we have here is a theological text, that is, a text that tells us about God.
- b. No matter what position you come from: literal 6 day creation account, or if you believe that the days refer to ages, or if you believe that the account is an account that conveys the truth of creation in a

literary framework... all of these positions agree that the text has a wonderful inherent framework to it:

- i. 3 pairs: the habitation; the inhabitants
 - ii. 1st (light,dark) with 4th (sun, moon)
 - iii. 2nd (seas, skies) with 5th (fish, birds)
 - iv. 3rd (land) with 6th (land animals + humans)
- c. In light of that I've structured this sermon as three pairs of truths.
- i. First set of three are truths about God
 - ii. The second set of three are the corresponding truths about humans.
- d. Truth 1: The starting point is God
- i. In the beginning God
 - ii. There is nothing beyond, above or behind God. No speculation transcends him.
 - iii. God isn't dependent on us.
 - iv. God is the starting point for every discipline and in God the fullness of truth is revealed.
 - v. Ethics, mathematics, philosophy, chemistry, linguistics, physics, art, economics. All are grounded in the Creator
 - vi. Take aways:
 1. Means we needn't be concerned about the expansion of knowledge in any field. We ought to be keenly aware at the collective presuppositions, but ultimately we know that the truth is found in God himself.
 2. Means that every job is invested with deep meaning.
 - a. The term occupation now tends to be used for the work that do. But it is a really lousy word that belies the truth in too many lives: that it is just what happens to occupy our time while we pull in a pay check.
 - b. The term vocation is a far better term that refers to our calling. Indeed, we are all called to something by God himself. Students, your vocation is your studies; there are some women or men whose vocation is to be housewives or dads.
 - c. Any pursuit we are called to is intrinsically invested with deep meaning because a) you are called to it and b) if you trace it back far enough the truths that undergird your calling are God's truths.

- e. Truth 2: God is sovereign
 - i. It is clear to anyone that Genesis 1 speaks of God's sovereignty and power over everything.
 - ii. It would have been particularly evident to the hearers because Genesis 1 was polemical in nature.
 - 1. By that, I mean that as you look at Genesis 1 through the eyes of the original hearers of the text what they would have heard all over this text were the gods of the surrounding nations: the sun god, the moon god, the gods of the sea, the cow god, the gods of the land...
 - 2. Even before the account: the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the deep (locus of gods resisting the gods of order). Even chaos itself cannot resist the all-powerful God.
 - 3. It's the equivalent of a cosmic taunt or heavenly trash talking. Notice that the two main gods, the sun and the moon remain nameless in the account: "oh, those two lights? They're mine too."
 - 4. God is pointing the finger at the surrounding nations and saying: "Listen up!" I AM *the* God. The one and only God. I made your so-called with the mere words out of my mouth.
 - 5. Each of these is spoken into existence by the Creator God with a word, and each is shown for what they are: finite things that are pronounced good by the Creator God, but things nonetheless.
- f. Truth 3: God speaks
 - i. The second action of God in scripture is abrupt: "And God said."
 - ii. An unbelievable revelation is made in this announcement: our God is a God who talks. God is a God who relates. God is personal and revelatory in his character. He relates to his creation and his reveals himself to his creation.
 - iii. This truth is the truth of Christianity in its shelled form.
 - 1. In John 1, John cracks open this nut for us and reveals its full blown truth.
 - 2. "In the beginning was the Word..."
 - 3. In other words: because God relates, because God speaks, God sent his son.

4. Or said another way that hits the truth more head on: because of the truth that one of the members of the Trinity, the Son, is called “the Word” – it would be impossible for God not to speak, not to relate, not to covenant with his people, not to save.
- iv. When was the last time you heard God speak to you?
 1. God most often speaks through his word to us.
 2. He also often speaks through his people to us.
 3. God also speaks in a still small voice to us sometimes when we are alone with him. This all too infrequently happens to me.
 4. When God called me to Westerly.
 5. Are you listening? To his Word? To his people? To his still small voice?

III. 3 truths about humans

a. Truth 1: We image ***God***

- i. Correlates to Truth 1 about God: that everything begins with God.
- ii. Ludwig Feuerbach: 19th century German theologian
 1. Religion: the magnification of the self into the heavens.
 2. All deities are merely constructs of the best (worst?) of ourselves
 - a. Curious George
 - b. Anthropomorphizing: ascribing to God the attributes of humans.
 3. Feuerbach was almost right: every religion save one does this very thing.
- iii. The audacity of Christianity
 1. That God has revealed himself to us; and further: that God has walked among us.
 2. Double audacity of Christianity: we invert Feurbach’s understanding and claim that the truth about humans lies in the divine. Instead of anthropormorphizing, we theomorphize: we explain humans in relation to God [Waltke].
- iv. This is a magnificently staggering claim that Genesis 1 makes: that we are made in the image of ***God***.
- v. We are not mere mortals... we image God on earth.
 1. “The high position of humans in Genesis stands out even more by comparison with the role humans had in the Old

Babylonian myth Atrahasis. At the beginning numerous gods had the task of laboring to feed the ruling gods. After forty years of such wearisome toil, these gods grew tired, burned all their tools, and quit working. Enlil, the storm god, decided to deal with their rebellion by killing one god. Enki, the god of wisdom, prepared clay mixed with the dead god's blood and flesh. Then Nintu, mother earth, pinched off fourteen pieces of clay and molded them into seven pairs of humans. After ten months these humans came forth from some kind of womb. The gods then imposed on the humans the toil formerly done by the gods. In this myth humans are the slaves to the gods. But in Genesis all humans, not just the royal line, bear God's image and thus have regal standing." John Hartley

- vi. Our imaging of God is worse but better than it once was.
 - 1. We image God in a number of ways: in the moral imprint that remains, in our physical bodies, in our immaterial spirits, in our mental capacities and creativity.
 - 2. This image was marred but not destroyed in the fall, by the sin that would arrive a mere two chapters later.
 - 3. But the image of God has begun to be restored to us in our re-imaging through the person of Jesus Christ who has become for us a new Adam, a new prototype and whose Spirit lives within believers.
 - 4. The fulfillment of this re-imaging will take place in our glorification in eternity.

b. Truth 2: We ***image*** God

- i. In the first truth: that we image God, we could say that it is revealed to us we are far more worthy than we thought possible. The second truth reminds us that we are, on the other hand, of far smaller stature than we assumed.
- ii. This truth correlates to the second truth about God: that God is sovereign.
- iii. Look at the text. Right after God creates humans in his image what does he do?

- iv. He does two things: 1) he tells them to be fruitful and multiply; 2) he gives them dominion over the earth.
 - 1. These injunctions are a double-barreled injunction. They are two mandates, but really one: God is calling humans to exercise dominion, or stewardship over two areas: procreation, and the creation.
 - 2. The Sovereign God, in his goodness, hands over bounded and limited sovereignty to his people.
 - 3. Unlike in the story about the Babylonian gods, who force people to do their work because they were too tired, our God allows us to be participants in his work, even though he doesn't need a trifle of help.
- v. We image God in our stewardship. That is why the Bible talks so much about money, because it is one of those areas that reveals our hearts, that reveals how well we are imaging God.
 - 1. How well are you imaging God? In the vocation he has called you to? In the children he has allowed you to steward? In the financial assets he has placed in your care? In your care of the environment he has placed us in?
 - 2. These are some of the areas of our dominion, as 21st century image bearers of God. Image him well, brothers and sisters.
- c. Truth 3: We image God
 - i. Relates to third truth about God: God speaks.
 - ii. "We" underscores a radical truth about God.
 - iii. Adam – can refer to man or humans.
 - iv. Writer goes to lengths to make sure there is no confusion.
 - v. In our imaging of God there is no gender who images God more accurately. Both image God.
 - vi. There is no room for racism. We are all, in the words of CS Lewis in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, "Sons of Adam" and "daughters of Eve"
 - vii. Furthermore, in God's providence, part of the image bearing of God takes place in relationships. Our Triune God is inherently relational and the love within the Trinity: of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is mirrored and imaged in our love for one another. And this is done in its highest form, as is described in Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5, in the marital relationship: between man and woman.

- viii. So don't try to image God alone. We image God most perfectly in community. So be part of a community. That is why Small Groups are the foundational ministry at Westerly. Get connected to the people of God and experience God in community.

IV. Conclusion

- a. Three parallel truths.
- b. Which are you rejecting? You cannot hold onto the truths on one side without holding onto the truths on the other.
- c. Don't forget that the God of the beginning is the God of the end.
- d. Revelation 21:1-4

“As God unfolds the drama of creation in successive days, building to a climax, so God develops the drama of history through successive epochs, which reach a dramatic climax when all volitional creatures bow to Christ.” Bruce K Waltke

“It is often said that the Bible represents God anthropomorphically. More accurately, a human being is theomophic, made like God so that God can communicate himself to people.” Waltke