

Creation II

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Genesis 2:15-25

Sermon Series:
God's Big Story

*God's Big
Story concerns
not only our
religious life;
God's Big
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our whole lives.*

Playwright George Bernard Shaw once said that if all the economists were laid end-to-end, they'd never reach a conclusion. His words capture what's happening on Capitol Hill this week as economists and politicians alike debate the merits of investing 700 billion dollars to bail out failing financial firms.

It's been called the worst stock market crisis in 60 years. Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy. Merrill Lynch was sold to Bank of America. It took a massive government bailout to save Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and AIG. Last Thursday, America's largest bank, Washington Mutual, was seized by federal regulators and sold to JP Morgan Chase.

We are discovering, much to our dismay, that the stock market is not fueled by helium. It doesn't always go up.

Theologian and journalist Michael Novak describes western democratic capitalism as a three-legged stool consisting of political freedom, economic freedom and moral restraint. Take away moral restraint and the stool collapses.

Suddenly everybody is talking ethics again. One of the so-called seven deadly sins is being discussed in the marketplace—greed. It's not enough for a company to make a profit. These days, company profits must be enor-

mous. Greed is much to blame for our debacle on Wall Street.

All of a sudden, the Bible has come on-line again. Our Scriptures rail against greed. They caution us against the twin dangers of debt and interest rates (what the Bible calls usury). Dishonest business practices are called evil. False evaluations and shady accounting practices are universally condemned. Insider trading is denounced as a form of theft. You may remember the only time Jesus went ballistic is when moneychangers were charging exorbitant interest rates for their money.

God's Big Story concerns not only our religious life. What percentage of our income do we give to support the Lord's work or where we will spend eternity? God's Big Story concerns our whole lives. What we do about ethics in the marketplace matters as much as what we do with our personal free time. That's why we are investing time in learning God's Big Story this year.

We began last Sunday with the first chapter of Genesis. "God created humanity in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26).

There is a story told about two scientists who discovered how to clone humans. These scientists said to God, "We don't need you any-

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- Mark Twain

more. We can make life by ourselves now.”

“Okay,” God replied, “let’s have a people-making contest.”

“It’s a deal,” said the scientists. “We’ll do it like you did in the beginning,” as they reached down to grab a handful of dirt to form the man.

“Hold it right there,” God said. “Get your own dirt!”

We keep pressing Genesis to tell us how God made the world when the question Genesis wants most to explore is why God created us. We are fashioned in God’s image. We have been created with a soul, the capacity to know and experience God.

You may be surprised to learn there are actually two creation stories in Genesis. The first chapter of Genesis is cosmological in nature. It begins with the grand sweep of the cosmos and concludes with the creation of humanity. Genesis 2 is more anthropological in scope. It focuses specifically on the creation of Adam, his environment and the making of his mate.

In Genesis 2, the creation of Adam and Eve appears first in the story, while in Genesis 1 they appear on the scene at the end of the week. Mark Twain once quipped, “Man was made at the end of the week when God was tired!”

We pick up the action in Genesis 2:7, when God forms man from the dust of the ground. There are several plays on words contained within this verse. The Hebrew word for man, Adam,

corresponds to *adamah*, the Hebrew word for ground. When God breathes life into Adam, the Hebrew word for breathe is the same word for wind and Spirit. When God breathes spirit or wind into Adam, he comes alive.

Genesis isn’t the only account in antiquity to depict our dust-from-the-earth origins. In the ancient Babylonian creation myth, Enuma Elish, man is likewise created from the dust of the earth, but is mixed with the blood of a demon god. We are part demon from the moment of our conception. It’s a rather disparaging view of humanity, given the high view of humanity expressed in the first two chapters of Genesis.

God summons Adam to “till the earth and keep it” (2:15). This verse reaches back to the mandate given in the first chapter about exercising dominion over the earth (1:27). Work is not a result of the fall (come back next Sunday to learn more about “the fall”). Work is a gift from God.

God issues to Adam a single command: “You may freely eat of any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (2:16-17).

God determines in verse 18 that “It is not good for man to be alone.” The English doesn’t do this verse justice. The Hebrew words “not good” are placed in emphatic position, so the effect of this verse is: “This is not good at all.”

“It is not good for man to be alone, so I will make a helper as his partner.” Sixteen out of the 19 times the word “helper” appears in the Old

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Testament, it is used in relationship with God. God is our ever-present help[er] (Psalm 46:1). This helper will not become Adam's gopher. This helper will become Adam's partner.

Adam exercises dominion over creation in naming the animals (1:19-20), which leaves him longing for a companion. So God causes a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, takes a rib and fashions him a partner. Adam recognizes her as his partner. He calls her woman (ishshah) to correspond to him as man (ish).

There is considerable debate over the meaning of woman being made from man's rib. A rib suggests a side-by-side connection. Peter Lombard, writing in the 13th century, says it well. "Eve was not taken from Adam's head to be his lord, nor from his feet to be his master, but from his side, to be his partner."

Adam exclaims, "This is now bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh!" The English is rather formal and poetic. What Adam's really saying is Wow!

"This man will leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and they become one flesh" (2:24). They become one flesh as husband and wife. We read in verse 25, "They were both naked and were not ashamed." Couples who select Genesis 2 to be read at their wedding often lop off verse 25 as too graphic. Ancient Hebrews were likewise embarrassed by this verse. That's why they covered themselves with long robes and elaborate scarves.

It's time to apply "the so what test" to this sermon. So what difference does this sermon make in my life?

1. Genesis teaches that we belong to God. Let me return to the crisis on Wall Street. Many of us are anxious right now about our investments. Everybody needs to take a deep breath and recite the Christian mantra this week: "We belong to God."

The reason the Bible rails against riches is not because money has any inherent virtue or evil associated with it. Rather, money has a way of binding us to what is physical and temporal and blinding us to what is spiritual and eternal. Novelist Henry Fielding once said, "If you make money your god, it will plague you like the devil." Money makes a good servant but a horrible master.

Where do we put our trust? It's right on our money. In God we trust.

2. Genesis teaches our place in God's creation. God fashions for Adam an idyllic paradise. God gives him the privilege of naming the animals. God gives him meaningful work to do and an ideal partner to love. God issues to Adam and later Eve a single restriction, they cannot eat from the knowledge-of-good-and-evil tree. God treats them as free moral agents in His world. They are capable of obeying or disobeying God. They, like us, have choices to make, and these choices have consequences.

If God didn't want people to eat from this knowledge-of-good-and-evil tree, why did He put it there in the first place? I suspect this tree is there to remind them that they are

not God. They can do a lot of things in creation, but one thing they can't be is sovereign. We can be a lot of things, but we can't be God!

3. Genesis teaches the essential goodness of our bodies. God creates our bodies good, not bad. Sometimes the church, in its zeal to communicate abstinence, conveys a sex-is-bad message. When kids discover sex can be enjoyable, they become suspicious that adults are lying to them about sex. Let's be perfectly clear: sex is God's idea. God created us sexual creatures. And like any gift, sex can be appreciated for what God intends or horribly abused.

4. Genesis teaches God's intentions for our life together in marriage and community. Genesis affirms three cardinal tenets: that God creates our bodies good, God makes us sexual beings and God intends sex for the life-uniting commitment of marriage. The two become one flesh is the way Genesis depicts it. Sex in Genesis is the culmination of commitment. How different from today's attitude, which regards sex as a tryout for future involvement.

We must add here an important qualifier: sexual expression is not essential to our humanity. Marriage is not the only way for man not to be alone. Indeed, Jesus as fully God and fully human, remained single. Jesus demonstrated full humanity as a single person. We experience full

humanity in both marriage and human community with one another.

When you hear me say God intends sex for the covenant of marriage, some of you will roll your eyes as though this is just a bunch of old-fashioned hooey. This message has become altogether counter-cultural in this sexually permissive age. There are plenty of people out there who are leading sexually reckless lives, and the results are killing them softly.

Genesis is an indispensable part of God's Big Story. How can your story become part of God's Big Story this fall?

Sex in Genesis is the culmination of commitment rather than a tryout for future involvement.

