

"Love on the Rocks"

Genesis Series - "Decisive Moments"

Pastor Rich Knight
Trinitarian Congregational Church
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Selections from Genesis 2 & 3

We're studying the book of Genesis this summer. We're especially looking for the turning points in the book, the decisive moments in the story of God's relationship with human beings. We're just getting started, of course. Last week we looked at the divinely inspired poetic account of Creation. We had 7 readers each take a day. You may have noticed that the 7th day is found in the first 3 verses of Ch. 2. One commentator points out that the Scriptures were divinely inspired but the guys who put in the chapter and verse divisions were not always divinely inspired. The Bible was not originally written with chapter and verse divisions. They're obviously very helpful to have, of course. The ancient manuscripts don't have them. The chapter divisions that we have today were devised by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, who started this project around 1227 A.D.

So, today we find ourselves in Genesis 2:4. I was surprised to see the heading in the NRSV Bibles, "Another Account of Creation." There are two ways of looking at Genesis Ch. 2.

1 - One approach is to say that Genesis 2 retells the story of Creation but this time focuses in on Adam & Eve. It's the same story line, but this time it's viewed through a zoom lens on the camera. Remember, Gen. ch. 1 doesn't mention Adam & Eve specifically. It just says, "God made humankind in his own image. Male and Female he created them."

2 - The other approach is to say that what we have here is a "Another Account of Creation," as the heading puts it. -- That sounds a bit strange the first time you here it, but think about it this way: How many

versions of the life of Jesus Christ do we have? Four. One was not enough. How many parables did Jesus tell trying to illustrate the Kingdom of God? 38. One parable was not enough. So it shouldn't surprise us that the Bible gives us two accounts, two stories about the beginnings of the world. It was a big event.

One reason why biblical scholars view this as a second account is starting with Gen. 2:4 a different word for God is used. "LORD" = Yahweh - the Name God revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Genesis Ch. 1 uses a different word for God - "Elohim" Take a look at Gen. 1 and the first sentence of each paragraph and you'll see this. Then look at Gen. 2 and we read it you'll see that "LORD God" is used throughout, signifying that Yahweh was the name for God utilized, not Elohim. This suggests a different author.

You'll also note a different order in the creation event. In Gen. Ch. 1, humans are made last. In Gen. Ch. 2, Adam is made before the animals and Eve is made after them. Ancient Jews put these two account back to back because they weren't bothered by the details not exactly matching up. They viewed these passages as stories, poetry and parables divinely inspired to teach us about God and ourselves.

Let's take a look. There are four scenes in this great story. We'll study three this morning. We'll stop after each one and take a closer look.

First, Genesis 2:4-17

4These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, 5when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up-for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; 6but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground- 7then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

8And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 10A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from

there it divides and becomes four branches. 11The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; 12and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. 14The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. 15The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

(Note on vs. 10-14 and the 4 rivers - two are real, two seem fictional. This may be the Bible's way of saying, "Yes, this is a parable, but pay attention, this is the story of real life in the real world.")

16And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

St. Paul's Cathedral in London is my favorite of all the cathedral's in Europe. It is gigantic - long and high. You walk in and instantly look up, which of course is by design. It's gives you a sense of God's almightiness. There's a Plaque inside that says this: "This cathedral was built to honor the majesty of God. But as great as God's majesty is, greater still is his mercy and love."

Genesis 1 highlights the majesty of God. God simply speaks, "Let there be light." and there is light. The whole universe is created simply by the sound of God's voice. This is strikingly different from any other creation stories from the ancient world. The Israelites believed in an awesome God. That's Chapter One.

They also believed in a tender God, a personal God. "Greater still is God's mercy and love." Chapter Two reminds us that the Creator of all that is, is intimately connected to us, so much so that God didn't just speak us into existence. God knelt down upon the earth, and took the dust of the earth in his hands and like a Master Potter, God shaped and created a human being. But that human being wasn't finished until God personally breathed life into his nostrils. We are here because of the very hands and breath of God.

Chapter One is "God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth," as

the creed says. In Chapter Two God is more like the Father in the Prodigal Son story who runs to his son, hugs him and kisses him when he returns home. More intimate, loving and personal. Well, we read in this chapter that God is a gardener. "God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man."

Vs. 15 - "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." In Genesis One the human beings are instructed to "fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over every living thing" (vs. 1:28). I like the language of Ch. 2 better - God says, "Here's the garden I have planted. It's for you. But I need you to tend to it. Till it. Plant the seeds. Care for this garden and it will treat you well." The environmental responsibility of this passage is clear, isn't it? "Till it and keep it." In the word for "keep" the garden can also be translated, "guard," "care for" and "protect."

Another thing that's clear from this text is that work is part of the plan. Adam has a job to do - even in paradise. One commentary puts it this way: "Paradise and work are not incompatible" and the idea that paradise is a place where everything we need magically falls into our laps while we sit around idly, is not a Hebrew idea. "In the Biblical paradise "Adam" is required to work" (John Gibson's commentary on Genesis, p. 111)

Well, Scene One ends with a Prohibition. Adam is only given one restriction in Paradise- don't eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil. We're not told much about this tree, except that it's off limits. What matters is not the make-up of the tree, but rather the make-up of Adam. Let's take a look at the next scene in the story.

Genesis 2:18-25

18Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." 19So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

21So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." 24Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

That's really a beautiful passage, isn't it? Two things I'd like to highlight.

1 - This scene in the drama teaches us that God is not enough. That's quite amazing considering we're just two chapters into the Bible. But Adam is lonely. He's got God all to himself. God walks with him in the Garden, one on one fellowship with his Creator, but it's not enough. He's lonely and God says that's not a good thing.

Rabbi Harold Kushner is the author of *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?*. He tells the story of a Rabbi who snuck out on Yom Kippur and went golfing. Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, the most holiest of days on the Jewish Calendar. There were services planned for all throughout day. But there was a small break in the afternoon between services, and so the Rabbi quietly went out the back door and drove to a local golf course to play a few holes. He didn't have time for 18 holes or even 9, but he still could play a few enjoy it. Well, on the very first hole that he played the Rabbi gets a hole in one. He is ecstatic and leaps in the air. And just as he is leaping the angels in Heaven begin to have a conversation with God. "That's not fair, Lord, he's golfing on the Day of Atonement! How could you let him make a hole in one! "He shouldn't even be out there enjoying himself." God just looks at the angels and says, "Relax, who's he gonna tell?" (What good is a hole in one if you can't tell anyone?)

God made us relational beings. We need each another - to celebrate one another's joys to lighten one another's burdens. To share life together. "It is not good for man to be alone." The word there for man is "adam." It doesn't just mean a man. It means human beings. "It is not good for humans to be alone." We're designed for relationships. Of course this

doesn't mean that everyone should get married, or that you're incomplete unless you're in an Adam & Eve relationship. It just means that we need close relationships in our lives -- to thrive, to live as we were designed. We shouldn't feel less about ourselves when we feel lonely. We're made for relationships.

2 - The other thing I'd like you to remember about this passage is the helper is Ezer. God seeks to make a "helper as a partner" for Adam. The word for helper used here is Ezer. It's used 19 other times in the Old Testament. In 16 of those 19 times it's used to refer to God as the partner, the helper, the Ezer of Israel. So the word helper is a very strong word, it is in no way a Jr. Partner position. Let's keep going.

Genesis 3:1-7

3Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" 4But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; 5for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

This scene is an amazing portrayal of the subtle and not-so-subtle power of temptation. The Tempter tries to get Eve to doubt the goodness of God- "Did God really say that you couldn't eat from any fruit?" He's trying to get her to believe that God is being way too strict. One rule is one too many! "These rules are ridiculous, Eve. You're really being held back here. You deserve more." He gets her to doubt that God is telling the truth - "You will not die. In fact, God knows when you eat from this tree you'll be just like God. God, really not looking out for you, Eve. Trust me."

Eve then starts justifying disobedience to God. This fruit looks nutritious. "It's good for food. It's really quite beautiful. It's just a beautiful piece of fruit. And, it will make me wise." This scene is a powerful reminder about our capacity for self-deception and self-justification.

Note that two parties are left out of the discussion.

1 - God. The serpent & Eve talk about God, but she never talks to God about it.

There was a pediatrician in a town where I once lived who was very much beloved by the kids & parents of the town. One of the things he always told the kids was, "Don't do anything you couldn't tell your Mother about." Eve would have done well with similar advice - "Don't do anything you can't tell God about."

2 - There's one other party who's left out of the deliberations -Adam.

Adam is a whimp in this scene. Vs. 6 tells us that Adam was with her during this whole encounter with temptation. And she never asks his opinion and he never offers it. Some partnership! Eve "also gave some of the fruit to her husband, who was with her, and he ate."

The Fall of Adam & Eve is the Bible's first illustration of how much we need God and how much we need each other. You know how this part of the drama ends - they're kicked out of the Garden of Eden. The first story involving humans in the Bible does not have a happy ending. That's a bit unsettling. But I think it leaves the ball in our court. It puts before us in very stark terms the consequences of the choices we make. Those choices can make the difference between Paradise Lost and Paradise Found. Think about it. Let's pray about it.

Loving God,

Thank you for these incredible words from scripture. I pray that I've allowed them to speak this morning in a way that is pleasing to you. Thank you for the Garden you have planted for us, and for the people we share it with. Help us to live in such a way that we get to experience more fully each day the blessings of Eden. In your name. Amen.