

2020 BIBLE IN A YEAR – CHRONOLOGICAL
Bible, Discipleship, Following Jesus
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January 6, 2020
CREATION

Readings for today: [Genesis 1-2](#)

"In the beginning God..." Before God does. God is. Before God speaks. God is. Before God acts. God is. God is the fundamental reality of all existence. The universe and all that is in it are contingent realities. They are temporal realities. They have a beginning and they will have an end. Not so with God. He is. He was. He will be. I am reminded of how God reveals Himself to Moses in the burning bush. He says, "I AM who I AM." A statement which in English can be rendered a number of different ways including "I WILL BE who I WILL BE." It signifies the timelessness of God. The eternity of God. God is the one constant in the universe. The true North Star. The firm foundation on which all of reality rests.

Remarkably, God creates. God creates everything in heaven and earth. He dumps it all out on the floor of his workshop where it lies formless and void. Darkness on the face of the deep. The waters of chaos swirling and churning while the Spirit hovers over everything. Then God speaks. Interestingly enough, J.R.R. Tolkien (author of the Lord of the Rings trilogy) imagined God singing at this point. Singing light into darkness. Singing matter into being. Singing life out of lifelessness. The song of creation crescendos with the creation of human beings. Creatures made in God's own image. Bearing His own likeness. Male and female together.

God blesses all He has made. Declares it good and righteous and pure. God has brought order to chaos. He has created a home to live in. A Temple to dwell in. And then He turns to humanity. Ordains them as priests and priestesses over all He has made. They are to be fruitful. Multiply. Bear His image over all the earth. They are to care and cultivate all He has made. They are to exercise dominion. Responsibility. They have the authority to reign and to rule in His name. It's a truly astounding picture. The grandeur and scope of all God has done takes our breath away.

This is the vision of God from the beginning and it's critical not to lose sight of it as we move forward from here. This was God's plan. This was God's design. This is what God is working towards even today. He wants to reclaim that which was lost. He wants to restore that which was broken. He wants to redeem that which was lost. And God is eternally consistent. Just as He entrusted His creation into our hands at the beginning, so that call continues to this day. He will not allow us to abdicate our responsibility. He will not allow us to relinquish our high priestly role. Christ is our forerunner. He serves as the Second Adam. The Faithful Adam. Adam as he should have been. And those who are found to be in Christ also become priests. Revelation 20:6 says, "They will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years."

Friends, this our eternal destiny! But it's not something that begins the moment we cross from this world to the next. It actually begins the moment we receive Christ. As soon as we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, we become Temples of the Holy Spirit. God sanctifying us from within so that we may fulfill our high calling to serve as His priests to the world. What does this mean for our lives? It means everything we do comes weighted with glory. Freighted with meaning and purpose. There is nothing mundane about your life. No interaction that is insignificant. For you are a high priest of the Living God! An image-bearer of the King of kings! Called forth into the world to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with His glory!

Readings for tomorrow: John 1:1-3, Psalms 8 and 104

January 7, 2020
CHRIST OUR CREATOR

Readings for today: [John 1:1-3; Psalm 8' Psalm 104](#)

"In the beginning was the Word..." Before God does. Jesus is. Before God speaks. Jesus is. Before God acts. Jesus is. Jesus is the fundamental reality of our existence. He is the Word. The Divine Logos. The Word that is God. The Word that was God. The Word that was with God in the beginning. He is the firstborn over all creation. Pre-eminent over all God has made. Through Him all things came into being. Nothing was made that has been made except through Jesus. The universe and all that is in it are contingent realities. Jesus is eternal. The world with all of its fullness is temporary. It has beginning and will have an end. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega. The beginning and the end. The first and the last. He is the great I AM.

Why jump to John after reading Genesis 1 and 2? Because the apostle is deliberately evoking the creation narrative. He wants us to understand Jesus is not just the Son of God...He is God. He didn't come into being at His birth but rather became one of us. The eternal entering the temporal. Immortal becoming mortal. Imperishable, perishable. Jesus exists from eternity in perfect communion with the Father and the Spirit. One God. Three Persons. Forevermore. Jesus is not a created being. He is the Creator. Jesus is not a human being. But a being in which both human and divine natures come together. Jesus is not just an enlightened teacher. Not just an extraordinarily good person. Not just a miracle worker. He is God incarnate. As such, He was present when all things came into being and an active participant with the Father and Spirit in creation.

This is the heart of the Christian faith. If we don't have a right understanding of Christ, we cannot worship God for who He is. If we don't have a right understanding of Christ, we cannot know God. If we don't have a right understanding of Christ, we will remake God in our own image. Reduce Him down to our size. Attempt to manipulate or control Him. Belittle Him. Ignore Him. Forsake Him. If Jesus is not God then there is no Christian faith and we're all just making it up as we go along. We are among men to be most pitied as the Apostle Paul will later say.

Friends, to have a relationship with Christ is to have a relationship with the Creator of the universe Himself. To know Christ is to know God in all His fullness. Christ is the image of God. In Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. There is no God beyond Christ. No God behind Christ. No God outside of Christ. All other gods are idols. All other conceptions of god are false. All other ideas about god are foolish. Everything we can say about God, we can say about Christ. Everything we will learn about God as we read the Old and New Testaments, we can attribute to Christ. He is the Word of God. He is with God. He is God! And so we sing with the Psalmist, "O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!" (Psalms 8:1)

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 3-5

January 8, 2020
THE FALL OF HUMANITY

Readings for today: [Genesis 3-5](#)

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? It's an important question. A close reading of Scripture reveals several things. First and foremost is the ability to procreate. Not just biologically but relationally and creatively. The first command God gives us is to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. This is the creation mandate given to humanity. Second, dominion. What separates us from the rest of the animal kingdom is that we are given responsibility. The authority to rule over all God has made. And we are called to exercise this call in God's name and for God's glory. Thirdly, it means community. It is not good for man to be alone. We don't do well when we are isolated from one another. So we get married. We build friendships. We have a longing deep inside our hearts to connect with other human beings in a deep way. Fourth, we are endowed with a free will. We are given real choices to exercise in our lives and because those choices are real, they come with real consequences. Good, bad, or otherwise. God created us in order to have a relationship with us. But in order for relationships to be real, they must be chosen. No one can force you to love. Love must be freely given.

So God creates Adam and Eve in perfection. He places them in a beautiful Garden where they will work and live and begin to exercise the call He has placed on their lives. Who knows how long they lived in paradise? Who knows how long they walked with God in the cool of the day? But God also had to take a risk. In order to have the relationship He desired with humanity, He had to give them a choice. They must be free to choose love or else it's not love at all. So He plants a tree in the Garden. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree represents a test for Adam and Eve. Will they love God or will they love Self? Will they choose God or will they choose Self? Tragically, they choose Self and the result is a cascading series of events as they, and the world they were given responsibility for, descend into violence, chaos and ruin.

The first thing that happens is they die spiritually. Their souls literally wither inside. Their hearts grow cold and hard. Their desires become disordered. Their wills become enslaved. Their thoughts are reoriented around themselves. As a result they feel shame. They feel fear. They feel pain. They feel anger and rage. They are disconnected from God. From one another. From the creation they were given charge over. Now the very ground will fight them. They will fight each other. And they will fight the very God who created them in the first place. Furthermore, their decision impacts their descendants as their sinful condition is passed down biologically to each successive generation. So Cain kills Abel and lives the rest of his life in fear. Tubal-Cain creates instruments of bronze and iron for war. Lamech kills a man for insulting him. Humanity descending further and further into evil and violence and hate. This is what's wrong with us. This is what's wrong with the world. This is the Bible's diagnosis of humanity's condition.

Psalm 51 declares that we are born into sin. Conceived in iniquity. All of us are corrupted. None of us escape. There is no such thing as an "innocent" human being. There is no such thing as a "pure" human being. We all rightfully deserve an eternity apart from God. An eternity east of Eden. An eternity of exile and separation and isolation and pain. And this is not some arbitrary or capricious judgment by God but the result of the very real, sinful choices we all make on a daily basis. We are

responsible for our own condition. We are suffering the consequences of the choices we've made. And the only hope we have is God's mercy and grace. His passion to pursue us despite our rebellion. His willingness to lay down His own life in order save us from our sin. Without God, we are lost. Without God, we are helpless. Without God, we are dead in our trespasses and sin. Completely unable and unwilling to fulfill the purpose for which we were created.

This is why we call what happened the "Fall." It was a fall from grace. A fall from glory. We "fell" out of love with God. Out of love for each other. Out of love for the world. And what we see happening around the world today is simply the ripple effect of that first tragic decision.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 6-7

January 9, 2020
THE CANCER OF SIN

Readings for today: [Genesis 6-7](#)

“What about the half-demon dudes?” I was in a small group men’s Bible study in college when I first heard about the Nephilim. I had never read Genesis 6 before and was completely confused. Who were the sons of God? Who were the daughters of men? Were we simply talking about the contrast between the descendants of Seth and the descendants of Cain? Is this the first injunction against intermarriage between the godly and ungodly that we see so often repeated in the rest of the Old Testament? Could it even be an oblique reference to Homo Sapiens intermarrying with Homo Neanderthalus? Or is there something more going on? Why were their offspring so special? Mighty men of old? Men of renown? The word “Nephilim” literally means “giants” so these folks were potentially a different breed than the rest of humanity. Could this perhaps be the origin of the myths and legends we see in so many cultures of half-human, half-divine heroes running around? An embellishment on stories passed down through the generations from the pre-Flood time period?

As crazy as it may sound, there are good, biblical reasons to believe the Nephilim are the offspring of angels and human beings. First of all, the only other time the phrase “sons of God” (bene elohim) is used in the Old Testament is in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7. In each case, it clearly refers to angels. Second, there are three New Testament passages that seem to suggest the same...1 Peter 3:18-22, 2 Peter 2:4-5, and Jude 6-7. For example, 1 Peter 3:18-22 says, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.” The “spirits in prison” being those rebellious angels who disobeyed God.

What did Christ proclaim to the spirits in prison? His victory over sin and death. His victory over hell and evil. His victory over Satan and all his minions. His victory over even their rebellion. Remember, Satan was present in the Garden when he hears God lay down not only the curse on humanity but also the first prophecy of a Messiah. Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” As a result, one can easily imagine Satan setting about to do all he can to prevent the prophecy from coming to pass. He would make it his aim to destroy the offspring of Eve. He gets to Cain as we saw in Genesis four, making him a murderer and destroying Abel before he can bear any children. But God’s plan will not be stopped so easily. He gives Adam and Eve a third son named Seth through whom the godly line will continue. Satan, seeking to pervert this line, sends his fallen angels (sons of God) to seduce the daughters of men and therefore bring corruption on the entire human race even at this nascent stage of its existence. The corruption was so vast and so evil that God actually regrets that he made man in the first place and is deeply grieved to see what has become of the special creature He made in His own image. And because the evil is so radical and pervasive, God performs an equally radical and pervasive form of surgery. Not because He’s angry or capricious or hateful but because He knows He must take this step to save the human race. Like a doctor treating a patient with stage four metastatic cancer, God gives the world “chemotherapy” in the form of a great Flood.

Whether the Flood was truly world-wide or more localized is not the point as humanity at this point in time would have only occupied a very small portion of the earth. As such, their view of the “world” would have been very limited. What we do know is that Noah, by faith, believed God and built an ark. I love how Hebrews 11:7 describes it, “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” So God cleanses the earth of its evil and corruption. With deep grief in His heart, He “uncreates” all He has made even as He’s trying to preserve it. It must have broken His heart to see everything die and yet die it must in order to give the world a second chance.

Anyone who has gone through cancer can identify on some level with this story. Sometimes the disease we face is so evil, we must undergo therapy that actually attacks our bodies with the hope that it will kill the corruption within us before it takes our lives. The reality is we all were born in sin. We all were born with a fallen nature. And this nature corrupts everything we do, every thought we have, every feeling or emotion we experience. There is not one part of our lives that is not touched by this disease. Thankfully, God is still performing “radical surgery!” Through the Holy Spirit, God “floods” our hearts with His grace, love, and power delivering us. Rescuing us. Lifting us above the death and destruction just as He once lifted up Noah and his family above the flood.

How has God saved you? Can you think of a time in your life when God reached down and delivered you? Where do you need saving today? God is able! Call on Him! As the floodwaters rise, threatening to overwhelm, know that God is still in the “ark-building” business! In Christ, He will deliver you!

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 8-9, Psalms 12

January 10, 2020
COVENANT RENEWAL

Readings for today: [Genesis 8-9; Psalm12](#)

God is faithful. Human beings are unfaithful. God is good. Human beings are evil. Evil being defined as "self-centeredness" instead of God-centeredness. God is holy. Human beings are corrupt. Over and over again, we will see this dynamic played out throughout the Bible. It's critical to keep this fundamental understanding clear in our minds. Human beings are not innocent. Human beings are not sinless. Human beings are not good people who make occasional bad decisions. We are cosmic criminals who deserve the death penalty for our many, many crimes against our Maker. God, on the other hand, is not like us. He is not arbitrary or capricious. He does not act on a whim or lash out in a rage. He is always consistent. Unchanging. Eternal. As such, He does not answer to us. He does not hold Himself accountable to our standards. His ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts higher than our thoughts. He is the Creator of the universe and is beyond any flawed human conceptions of justice, righteousness, or fairness.

How else can we understand the Great Flood? The deluge that caused the death of every living thing outside the ark? An act of "uncreation" as God hits the reset button. Imagine Noah walking off the ark for the first time. What did he see? An earth that had become "formless and void" again. An earth that was desolate and ruined. Nothing alive. Nothing but rot and ruin. Nothing like the Garden where Adam and Eve first dwelt. But God isn't finished. Creation will be renewed. The creation mandate is restored. God will re-create but it will be in and through His image-bearers. His priests and priestesses. The people made in His image who are once again commanded to be "fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth" with the glory of the Creator. He once again gives them dominion over all He has made. He once again sends them out to cultivate and care for creation. He once again promises to establish His covenant with them and their offspring forever.

"And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it." "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth." (Genesis 9:1-3, 6-7, 9, 12-17)

This is an astonishing decision by God. To entrust His creation to a creature He knows is untrustworthy. To hand the world He loves so much into the hands of a creature who is self-centered and self-serving.

To give this creature a second chance to fulfill the calling for which they were created, all the while knowing they will fail. Most of all, God binds Himself to this creature in relationship. Establishes His covenant with this creature for all eternity. He commits Himself to this creature and in so doing, freely and willingly opens Himself up to a world of pain and disappointment and heartbreak. Such grace! Such love! Such compassion! Our God is a God of steadfast love and faithfulness. His mercies are new every single morning. His loyalty never ends. His zeal for us never changes. His pursuit of us is relentless. He will never let us go.

You and I are just like Noah. If I had been on that ark and watched the world be destroyed, I can pretty much guarantee the first thing I'd do is plant a vineyard and drink myself into oblivion! If my son "uncovered my nakedness" (an ancient near east euphemism for rape and one of the many horrific ways men demonstrated their power over one another in ancient cultures), I'd wake up cursing as well! We simply cannot escape ourselves. Man's inhumanity towards man knows no bounds. We all know this is true. We see it on display ever single day. From the hatred and rage on Twitter to the racism of white supremacy to our fascination with guns and violence to the terrible, inhumane treatment of immigrants and refugees to the rapacious greed that causes us to exploit not only the earth but one another. Humanity is a brutal species. Her divine calling gone horribly wrong. The exercise of her dominion becoming tyrannical as sin has its way. The only hope we have is God. The only antidote to our condition is Christ. The only way to break free from our bondage to sin is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God for His salvation! Thanks be to God for Christ who is the "ark of our salvation!"

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 10-11

January 11, 2020
TOWER OF BABEL

Readings for today: [Genesis 10-11](#)

“I don’t understand.” If only I had a dollar for every time I’ve heard that phrase come out of one of my child’s mouths. Usually it’s a response generated by a request from either myself or their mother for them to do something. Homework. Chores. Dishes. Taking out the trash. We ask them to sit down and finish their work. We ask them to put aside their devices so they can focus. We ask them to work first so they can play later. They resist us, of course. They want to do what they want to do. They want their own way. They want to be in control of their own lives. They struggle to submit to any kind of authority be it their parents or their teachers at school. However, they are smart enough to know they can’t just refuse so they tell us they “don’t understand.” It’s a crafty play, I’ll give them that! But as we gently but firmly ask questions to tease out what they mean we tend to almost always land on the fact that they just don’t want to do what we’re asking them to do. Any parents out there want to give me an “Amen?” ;-)

It’s the first thing I think about when I read the Tower of Babel story. I can almost hear humanity drawing in a collective breath and saying to God, “I don’t understand.” What do you mean you want us to “be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth?” What do you mean you want us to “exercise dominion over all you have made?” What do you mean you want us to bear your image into all creation? What do you mean, God? Why can’t we simply stay together? Stay safe? Stay comfortable? Don’t you value family, God? Isn’t family our “first ministry?” Think of all the things we can do for you right here, God! We all speak the same language. We know each other really well. Look, we can even build a tower to the heavens!

It’s not about understanding, of course, it’s about obedience. My children don’t need to always understand why I ask them to do the things I ask them to do though I do try to give them as much information as possible. Humanity doesn’t always need to understand why God commands us to fulfill the creation mandate. We simply need to obey. I am quite sure the descendants of Noah were suffering from deep-seated, historical trauma. Their entire world had been destroyed in a great flood. The echoes of that terrifying natural disaster would have rippled out across the generations. No wonder they wanted to stay together! No wonder they wanted to build a tower that stretched to the heavens! It would serve as a fixed point on the horizon of their lives. It would help them feel safe. Secure. No matter how far away they got, they could always look back and see the tower they had built. Not only that but it boosted their collective self-esteem. Their collective self-image. Their collective self-confidence. They were not at the mercy of their elements! They were not at the mercy of the natural world! They had shaped and formed a tower so immense it would rise above any future flood that may come. It would protect them. It would serve as a place of refuge in case something terrible happened.

Friends, this is our fundamental problem. We want to trust in ourselves rather than God. We want to do things our way rather than God’s way. We want to be in control. But God demands obedience. Not because He is capricious or arbitrary or mean but because He has a plan. He has a purpose. He has a design for our lives and He knows we will find our greatest joy, our greatest hope, our greatest peace in serving Him. “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. Exercise dominion over all I have made. Bear

my image into all of creation.” This is the mandate given to humanity and every time we resist it. Every time we push back against it. Every time we refuse to obey, there will be judgment. Not because God delights in punishing us but because God has entrusted us with great authority and great responsibility to be His priests and priestesses over all the earth. You are more powerful than you can ever imagine. You have more influence than you can ever know. If you are a Christian, you are God’s Temple. God’s Spirit lives inside you. And now He sends you out to bring His glory to the world.

Readings for tomorrow: None. Enjoy worship with your church family!

January 13, 2020
CALLING

Readings for today: [Genesis 12-13](#)

“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

A lot of Christians believe God has placed a “call” on their life. Most of the time what we mean by that is that God has a plan for us. A good plan. A hopeful plan. A plan that involves blessing. In the American church today, God’s “call” is always positive. It is closely aligned to worldly success. Leading a growing church. Getting that promotion at work. Making more money. Becoming an influencer. Making a greater impact. Personally, it means remaining healthy. Building a healthy marriage. Launching our children into life successfully and well. Very few people I meet believe God “calls” them into hardship. Suffering. Difficulty. Uncertainty. Pain.

Because the “health and wealth” gospel has so ingrained itself into our consciousness, it’s challenging for us to put ourselves in Abram’s shoes. We tend to read his life backwards to forwards. We look at where he ended his life. A child of his own. Incredible wealth, power, and a good reputation. A promise from God that from him would come a great nation. We make some false assumptions. We assume everything Abram touched turned to gold. We assume following the call of God was easy. We assume Abram was faithful and therefore never suffered or struggled or wrestled with doubts and fears. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Acts 7 tells us that Abram first received his call from God while living in Ur. God told him to take his family and “go to the land I will show you...” This would present a number of problems right at the start. First and foremost, Abram is not the leader of his clan. His father is still alive so Terah would need to sign off on the move. Second, they would be intentionally leaving all their family and tribal and social connections behind. Businesses were not portable. Skills were not necessarily transferable. They would literally risk their lives to start over in a new community where they knew no one. Third, it meant saying goodbye to friends and family forever. People you love whom you would never see again. Fourth, they were moving sight unseen. They didn’t know where the journey would take them. They had no idea what life would look like in the land where they were going. They didn’t know what they would find there. They only knew God was calling them so they went.

It’s a remarkable step of faith. And though the Bible doesn’t tell us much, we know they suffered along the way. Abram’s brother, Haran, died in Ur before the journey even got started. His father Terah died while they lived in Haran. Once they arrived in the Promised Land, they were immediately met with a life-threatening famine. They went to Egypt where Abram’s wife was essentially “trafficked” into Pharaoh’s harem. Upon their return to the Promised Land, conflict flares up between his servants and Lot’s servants forcing them to separate. Lot choosing the better, more fertile land on which to graze his herds and build his wealth. Throughout this time, of course, Abram and Sarai continue their struggle with infertility. As painful as that struggle is today, it was much, much worse in ancient times

where the future of one's family rests on the ability to produce heirs. All of this is part of the "call" God put on Abram's life.

This presses an important question for all of us. What is God's call on our life? Do we even think in those categories? Is it possible for God's call to include suffering, hardship, failure? How would you respond if God called you like Abram and Sarai to a journey involving uncertainty, fear, and anxiety? Would you walk by faith like they did?

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 14-16

January 14, 2020
THE PROMISE OF GOD

Readings for the day: [Genesis 14, 15, 16](#)

A few years ago, I went to Ethiopia. The day we arrived marked the end of several days of unrest. Conflict. Protests that often grew violent. Our Ethiopian partners were visibly uncomfortable taking us to Gojo where we were to conduct our church planter training and medical clinic. They wanted to make sure we stayed safe. We eventually loaded up the Land Rovers and headed out on our four hour plus trip. As we traveled, we passed right through where the riots had been just a day or two before. Large rocks littered the road. Burned out vehicles had yet to be cleared. A large semi-truck had been set on fire and flipped over. And while we were never in any real danger, we were reminded of the political realities on the ground in this country we love so much.

The conflict in Ethiopia is tribal just like the conflict in Abram's day was tribal. All these different kings led different tribes and they often fought as they sought to expand their power and influence. If one lived in those days, one might have been tempted to believe this is where the real action was taking place. The kings of Shinar, Ellasar, Elam, and Goiim making war with the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela. One might be tempted to think something significant rested on the outcome of their battle. But the Bible almost treats their conflict as an afterthought. Reading the passage, one gets the sense that the only reason this story is included at all is because Lot got caught up in it, forcing Abram into action. You see, the real action in these chapters has nothing to do with kings (even Melchizedek) and tribes and nations and their power struggles. No, the real action. The real drama. The real conflict involves an old man and his barren wife and their struggle to have children. It has to do with God and His promise to Abram and Sarai that they would have a son to carry on their family name. The real struggle is God telling Abram to look up into the heavens and number the stars of the sky, for so shall his offspring be.

And what is Abram's response? Faith. He believes. Even crazier than taking 318 men and defeating four kings as they returned victorious from battle is old, childless Abram looking up into the night sky and believing God's promise. That's why God declares him righteous. Because of his faith. And what is faith? The Apostle Paul will later say Abram was "fully convinced God was able to do what He had promised." (Romans 4:21) That's the definition of true faith.

But God's not done. He not only gives Abram this promise, He seals it by making a covenant with him. In the ancient near east, these ceremonies were common. Vassals would approach their kings and promise on their lives to fulfill the terms of the covenant they were making. The crazy thing about Genesis 15 is it flips the whole ceremony on its head! Instead of Abram approaching God, it is God who puts Abram to sleep and approaches him! God is the one who makes His way through the halves of the animals, essentially declaring to Abram that He will fulfill the conditions of this covenant or cease to exist! It never ceases to shock me every time I read it!

Furthermore, as we have already seen, God's faithfulness is unconditional. Even when Abram and Sarai take matters into their own hands - as in the case of Hagar and Ishmael - God is there to turn it for His good purpose. Because God has committed Himself to Abram and his family, He will never let

go. No matter what they say. No matter what they do. God will remain faithful to the end. He must because He has pledged His own life to this covenant.

Can you begin to fathom the fact that in Christ, we see the fulfillment of Genesis 15? God sacrificing His own life for the sake of Abram and his descendants? God sealing a new covenant by giving His body and shedding His blood? Do you understand the great faithfulness of God to His people? The lengths to which He is willing to go for the sake of those He loves? Abram. Sarai. Hagar. Ishmael. You and me. It's amazing!

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 17-19

January 15, 2020
BY FAITH

Readings for today: [Genesis 17-19](#)

“The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to Him!” These immortal words, spoken by British revivalist Henry Varley at a tent meeting one night in Dublin, Ireland, ignited a fire in a young man named D.L. Moody that wouldn’t stop raging until two continents had heard the gospel and over a million souls come to Christ. It’s one of my all-time favorite quotes and it describes Abram perfectly.

Just consider the life of this great man. He was the youngest of three brothers but first in pre-eminence. He lived the first seventy years of his life in Ur where he worshipped idols. (Joshua 24:2) God appeared to him during that time and called Abram to take his first steps of faith. (Acts 7:2) “Leave Ur”, God said, “And go to the place I will show you.” And Abram went. He lands in Haran for five years where he loses his father. His brother stays behind. At age 75, Abram leaves Haran for the place God had yet to show him, eventually coming to Canaan. There he experiences famine, danger, violence, conflict. He gets caught up in tribal wars and meets kings. He amasses his wealth and possessions and influence. He builds altars and worships God. He struggles with his family, having to separate from his nephew and mediate a conflict between his wife and her servant. At age 86, he fathers his first child Ishmael. He receives a new name at age 99. He also gets circumcised! He observes the complete and total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities he knew with people he loved like Lot and his family whom Abram (now Abraham) never saw again.

What drives a man to live such a life? Faith. Complete surrender to God. Throughout the course of his life, Abraham received all kinds of promises from God. The Promised Land. Innumerable offspring. Blessings untold. A lot of which would not happen in his lifetime. Not that it mattered all that much because according to Hebrews 11:10, Abraham had his eyes set on a much greater prize. “To the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”

So I take issue with Henry Varley. As much as I like his quote and as much as I love D.L. Moody. The fact is the world HAS seen what God can do with a man fully consecrated to Him. All one has to do is look at the life of Abraham. And when you look, look closely. It’s not a perfect life. It’s not a safe life. It’s not an easy life. Abraham is given far more than he can ever handle. He is pushed further than he himself would ever choose to go. God never stops demanding, never stops commanding. And he just keeps walking by faith. Putting one faltering foot in front of the other. Over the course of a lifetime, Abraham learns to trust God. He builds a deep relationship with God. He is called God’s “friend” (James 2:23) and the father of God’s chosen people. (Psalm 105:6)

Friends, all of “creation is waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the sons and daughters of God.” (Romans 8:19) The world doesn’t need perfect people. The world doesn’t need safe people. The world doesn’t need rich and powerful people. What this world needs are men and women, young and old, from every tribe, tongue and nation who will dedicate every waking hour of every day to the advancement of God’s Kingdom on this earth! Are you such a person? Do you want to be such a person? Then claim this promise from 2 Chronicles 16:9 for your own, “The eyes of the Lord run to

and from throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him." Believe Him! And trust in His grace, love and power!

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 20-23

January 16, 2020
FEAR OF THE LORD

Readings for today: [Genesis 20-23](#)

Fear is a powerful motivator. Often driving us to do things we wouldn't otherwise do. Make choices out of desperation rather than faith. Lot's daughters, for example, from yesterday's reading were afraid they would never find a husband which during that time period would have meant a death sentence. So they got their father drunk and slept with him. Abraham's afraid someone might kill him and try to steal his wife so he tells Sarah to lie about their relationship. (By the way, does it seem strange to anyone else that Abimelech would want a ninety year old woman in his harem?) After Isaac is born, Abraham is afraid of the budding conflict between Sarah and Hagar and the potential of a divided household so he lets Sarah throw Hagar and Ishmael out. I imagine if we sat and reflected for a moment, we can all think back to choices we've made that we regret that were driven by similar fears.

The most common command in the Bible by far is "Do not be afraid." God doesn't want us to walk in fear. He tells us 1 John 4:18, "Perfect love casts out fear." He tells us 2 Timothy 1:7 that He has "not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love, and discipline." At the same time, there is one fear we are called to embrace. The fear of the Lord. I love what the prophet Isaiah says, "But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." (Is. 8:13) Now I know we don't like to think of God in these categories. We are deeply unsettled at the idea that we would "fear God." At the same time, what I've learned in my own life is when I fear God, I fear nothing else. And this is what Abraham learned as well.

One of the most famous stories in all of Scripture is the sacrifice of Isaac. It has been the subject of the most incredible artwork throughout the centuries. It has influenced the plot lines of famous works of literature. There is something deeply compelling about this story for believers and non-believers alike. An old man taking his son. His only son. The son whom he loves and offering him as a sacrifice. In our minds eye, we can see them climbing the mountain together. Abraham with the fire and knife. Isaac carrying the wood. As we picture the scene, we can almost hear Isaac poignantly questioning his father - such a tender scene - "My father!" And Abraham said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." I imagine Abraham answering Isaac with tears in his eyes. They get to the top of the mountain. Abraham builds an altar. Binds his own son. Lays him down. Raises the knife. And that's when God steps in. "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

I've often wondered what kind of impact this experience had on Abraham and Isaac? What did this do to their relationship? And yet, even the father/son relationship is not as important as Abraham's relationship with God. He must fear God above all else. He must trust God above all else. He must honor God above all else. He must have faith in God above all else. The writer of Hebrews, as he looked back on this story and reflected on Abraham's faith, says Abraham "considered that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." (Heb. 11:19) No matter what, Abraham knew God had promised him a son. He knew Isaac was that

son. He knew the future rested on this son. And he trusted God even when it seemed like His commands put everything at risk.

Some might argue this whole scene makes God into a monster. What kind of God demands human sacrifice? Christians know it's simply foreshadowing. Fast forward a few thousand years and we have another Father and Son having this same conversation in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Son asking the Father if this is truly what the Father commands. If there can't be another way. One can almost see the Father answer His Son. His only Son. The Son whom He loves with tears in His eyes. So Jesus takes up the cross. Climbs the exact SAME mountain Abraham and Isaac did so many centuries before. He lies down on the altar. The Father raises His Hand - there is no ram this time to take Jesus' place - and ends His Son's life. All to save humanity from our deepest, darkest fears..

What are you afraid of today? What's driving the choices you make? Is it fear of what others might say? Fear of facing the consequences of your actions? Fear of losing something you love? Fear God, friends! Honor Him as holy! Look to the Cross and consider the great love He has for you! As you fix your eyes on Jesus, you will feel the fears that so often drive us loosening their grip. Fear God and you will fear nothing else!

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 24-26

January 17, 2020
ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Readings for today: [Genesis 24-26](#)

God will fulfill His promise. God will be faithful to His covenant. God will make sure His mandate is followed. From the beginning of Genesis we have seen a common theme appear over and over again. Be fruitful. Multiply. Fill the earth. Exercise dominion over all God has made. This is God's plan for humanity. This is God's plan for His people. This is the direction given to Adam and Eve. Noah and his family. Abraham and Sarah. And now it comes to Isaac and Rebekah.

However, an important grammatical change has taken place. Instead of humanity being responsible for fulfilling this mandate, God Himself takes the responsibility on. "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." (Genesis 26:3-4, 24) God will not let His covenant be broken. God will not let His promises fail. Despite the mistakes and missteps we make along the way - like claiming our wives as our sisters or conflict with our neighbors - God uses all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. Remember, God has committed Himself to us. He walked through the halves of the animals to signify the gravity of His resolve. The plan of God cannot fail because God will not fail.

This truth is life-changing. For people. For churches. For anyone who calls on the name of the Lord. God may not fulfill all your desires. He may not grant all your wishes. He may not answer all your prayers. But if you seek Him, He will make you fruitful. He will multiply your reach and influence. He will bless you so that you fill the earth with His glory and His image. He will give you dominion over whatever spheres of influence you find yourself in. Not so you will be healthy and wealthy. Not so you will never experience suffering or hardship. One cannot measure God's faithfulness using worldly means! No, this is about God's Kingdom. God's glory. God's honor. God's plan from before the foundations of the world. God will have His way on earth. God will have His way with us. God will not rest until His will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

So what is our role? Worship. Note Isaac's response to God's promise in his life. "He built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent..." (Genesis 26:25) God simply wants our worship. Our love. Our adoration. He simply wants us to thank Him. Praise Him. Glory in all He is doing on our behalf. He simply wants our submission. Our obedience. Our trust that His way is the best way - really, the only way - to live. God loves you, friends! God is for you! God is with you! God is working even now to bring His plan to pass in your life. Will you walk before Him like Abraham? Will you seek Him like Isaac? Will you submit your way and your will to Him like our forefathers and foremothers in the faith?

Readings for tomorrow: [Genesis 27-29](#)

January 18, 2020
A BEAUTIFUL MESS

Readings for today: [Genesis 27-29](#)

Our readings today highlight some very important truths. God meets us where we are but refuses to let us remain there. God accepts us as we are but doesn't affirm all we do. God loves us unconditionally and works through His relationship with us to grow us spiritually.

The family of Abraham's a mess. Rebekah takes advantage of her blind and disabled husband to promote the cause of her favorite son. Esau continues to despise the responsibilities that come from being the firstborn of the household. Selling his birthright. Marrying outside the family. Jacob's a momma's boy who uses deceit to get ahead. Not only does he steal the blessing his brother rightfully deserved, he also deceives Laban in order to gain wealth and privilege and status. Granted, Laban returns the favor but it doesn't make it righteous. Jacob even tries to manipulate God. When God appears to Jacob to renew the covenant promise He made to Abraham and Isaac, Jacob tries to make a deal. "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you." (Genesis 28:20-22) He tries to make the unconditional covenant of God conditional. It's stunning in it's boldness and ignorance.

And yet, how many times do we try and do the same? You and I are no different than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We are no different than Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel. We are all broken people seeking to become whole. We are foolish people seeking to become wise. We are sinful people seeking become righteous. We look for love in all the wrong places. We place our hope in all the wrong things. We ground our identities in temporary realities that fade so quickly. As Jesus put so well, "We're building on sand." And when the storms of life blow. When the ground shakes beneath our feet. When the trials and tribulations come - as they always do - everything we've built for ourselves comes crashing down around us.

God is faithful. Faithful to His promise. Faithful to His covenant. How can He stand the deceit of Jacob? The favoritism of Isaac and Rebekah? The foolishness of Esau? Why does God work with such sinful people to accomplish His purposes? Surely these men and women are no more or less sinful than the people around them? What makes them so special in God's sight? Simply this...God chose them. God elected to save them and not the others. God determined to use them for His purposes in the world. And the same remains true for us today. Why does God not step in and save every single human being on the planet? Why does God not step in and eradicate evil once and for all? Why does God not step in and set our world to rights? What is God waiting for? Perhaps even better, why did God choose me? Why did God save me? What purposes does God want to use me for in this world?

Ultimately, I have no idea why God chooses some and not others. Why He puts up with some and judges others. I only know God has made us a promise. He has made a covenant with His people. He will never break it. Never abandon it. Never let it fail. He has staked His very existence on it. The covenant of God is eternal. Unchangeable. Fixed in the timeline of heaven. It rests on His immutable

character. It stands on His unfailing love. It is driven by His amazing grace. To be sure, I am a mess but thanks be to God that He is making something beautiful out of my life.

January 20, 2020
WRESTLING WITH GOD

Readings for today: [Genesis 30-33](#)

Jacob is one of my favorites. He and I are so alike. I can remember when I was young making all these pacts with God. If God would take care of me. If God would provide for me. If God would come through for me. Then I would be faithful. Then I would serve Him. Ultimately, of course, I was asking God to bless my plans. I was treating God like a genie in a lamp. I wanted Him to meet my needs. I wanted Him to give me what I desired. And I never thought to ask Him what His desires were for my life. Nor was “submission” in my vocabulary. So I went about my life trying to make it all happen on my own. In my own strength. According to my own wisdom. There was a lot of manipulation and scheming and lying in those days. I hurt a lot of people I loved. Eventually, it all caught up to me and I found myself in a very dark place. That’s when I first wrestled with God.

Jacob begins this journey to Laban’s household by making a similar pact with God. Genesis 28:20-21, “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God...” And for the next two decades, he worked hard at life. He got married. He had children. He amassed a fortune. He thought he was doing it all on his own. And he’s not the only one. Everyone involved in the story seems to think they are in charge. Leah and Rachel battle over who gets to sleep with Jacob, each trying to win Jacob’s affections by having as many children as possible. Leah even “buys” a night with Jacob from Rachel with mandrakes (an ancient aphrodisiac)! Laban and Jacob try to outscheme one another as they compete for the flocks of goats. Laban removing a certain number. Jacob countering this (or so he thinks) by superstitiously having his goats breed in front of certain trees that have been peeled, etc. It’s all very humorous in a way and I actually think we are meant to laugh along with the story as it unfolds.

Of course, the impact of all this scheming and manipulation is brokenness. Jacob’s relationship with Laban deteriorates to the point where he realizes he needs to flee. For seven days, Laban chases him until God comes to him in a dream warning him not to touch Jacob. But that’s not the worst of it. Jacob has gone from the frying pan into the fire as he knows he will have to face his brother Esau again. Esau, the man who wanted to kill him. Esau, who is bringing four hundred men to meet him. Jacob’s scared. Anxious. Afraid. He’s trapped between Laban and Esau. Two men who hate him for what he’s done. He cannot escape. But he does the only thing he knows how to do. He puts together a plan. He divides his camp with the hope one can escape. He puts together a large gift and sends it on ahead hoping to ease Esau’s anger. And after he has completed all his preparations, he finds himself alone. Alone with his fears. Alone with his anxiety. All alone in the dark.

That’s when God shows up and He begins to go to work on Jacob. Wrestling with him. Struggling with him. Forcing Jacob to come to grips with himself on a lot of levels. Forcing Jacob to face his past, his sin, his fear, his brokenness. But Jacob is a strong and stubborn man. He fights God all night long. He doesn’t want to give in. Doesn’t want to surrender. Finally, God dislocates his hip. And Jacob is defeated. But even in his defeat, Jacob won’t let go. Not until God blesses him. So God gives him a new name. Israel. Meaning “God contended”. For Jacob fought with God and with man and prevailed. Not that he beat God but that he beat himself. He finally came to grips with who he is before God. Something he confirms in 32:30 when he says, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has

been spared.” Jacob is humbled. He’s finally surrendered. He’s submitted himself to God and one can see his heart change in his reconciliation with Esau.

What’s your relationship with God like? Is it transactional? Meaning, you scratch God’s back and He scratch’s yours? Do you find yourself asking God to bless your plans or are you seeking His plan for your life? Have you ever wrestled with God like Jacob? Have you ever been humbled by God? Broken by God? I certainly have been at several points in my own life. It’s part of the discipleship process. We must learn to surrender our own will to His and it’s not an easy or always pleasant process.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 34-37

January 21, 2020
GOD IS OUR REFUGE

Readings for today: [Genesis 34-37](#)

One of the things that makes the Bible so hard to read and understand at times are the actions of God's people. They are chosen. They are set apart. They are sacred. They are supposed to be God's light in the world. They are supposed to set godly examples. As such, we expect more from them. We expect them to be good people. Holy people. If not perfect, we certainly expect them to be a cut above the rest. But then we read a story about the sons of Jacob taking out their anger and rage on an entire city of people. We read about them killing scores of people in cold blood. Murdering them in their beds. Yes, the rape of their sister is horrific but their violent response is disproportionate. In our minds, they should have just killed Shechem. Not his entire family, clan, and tribe. Furthermore, we get even more confused with God's response. Rather than judge them or leave them to face the consequences of their actions, God provides a refuge for them. God protects them. God gives them sanctuary. "God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." (Genesis 35:1)

What is God doing? How can He overlook the sins of His people? Treat them differently than the pagan nations that surround them? It doesn't seem fair or just or righteous. A just response would be God leaving His people at the mercy of the Canaanites and Perizzites who surround them. Here is where we have to remember the character and nature and covenant promise of God. God is just. God is righteous. God is holy. As such, He has every right to consign every single human being who has ever lived to hell. He has every right to destroy this planet and everything with it. He has every right to scour the earth and start all over. This is what we have rightfully earned through our sin and rebellion. There is no such thing as an innocent human being. No matter how young or old. All are guilty. All deserve death. This is the fundamental premise undergirding all of Scripture. God is also merciful. And out of His great mercy, He chooses a people through which He will make Himself known. He chooses these people not because they are more holy. Not because they are wonderfully moral and righteous people. Not because they are somehow a cut above the rest. He chooses them purely out of grace. His choice is sealed by a covenant. The covenant He made with Abraham. The scene from Genesis 15 where God walked through the halves of the animals. On that day, God bound Himself to His people. Made them a promise He will never revoke. He would be their God. They would be His people. Come hell or high water, God is committed.

God's people are like anyone else. They sin. They rebel. They lie. Deceive. Steal. They murder out of anger and rage. They act in all sorts of unrighteous and unjust ways. This was true for Israel. This is true for us. We are not better than our non-Christian neighbors. We are not more righteous. We are not more holy. We don't always make better choices. We don't always hold to a stronger moral center. We are broken. We are messy. Our only hope is that God remains our refuge and strength. A very present help in times of trouble. God is as committed to us as He was to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is as faithful to us as He was to His people. God is gracious to us. Merciful to us. God disciplines us and punishes us. God will not rest until we fulfill the calling He has placed on our lives to be His covenant people. Until that day comes, He will work with us, in us, and through us. He will use despite our sin and brokenness. And in this way, He remains faithful to Himself. Thanks be to God!

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 38-40

January 22, 2020
GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Readings for today: [Genesis 38-40](#)

God is sovereign. God stands outside time and space. He is not bound by the constraints of this world. Not human history as it unfolds. Not the laws of physics He set in motion. Not the choices of His people, sinful or otherwise. God is sovereign. God is sitting on His throne in heaven even now. His hand at the controls. He moves according to His will and purpose. He acts in accordance with His character and nature. He is faithfully guiding all of history according to the plan He made from eternity.

We see this on display in the story of Judah and Tamar. Judah makes all the wrong choices in this passage. He marries a Canaanite woman. Two of his three sons are put to death for their sin. Judah reneges on his promise to Tamar. Withholding his third son out of fear of what might take place. He sleeps with someone he believes is a temple prostitute. He hypocritically accuses his daughter-in-law of sexual immorality once it's discovered she's pregnant. Finally, he repents when he realizes his own sinful choices have led him to this point. Still God uses it for His glory. Still God bends even Judah's sinful choices to His sovereign will. The twins Tamar bears will become important markers in the line of Jesus. Tamar herself will gain a mention in the Savior's genealogy.

We see God's sovereignty on display in Joseph's life as well. Arrogant and prideful, he is despised by his brothers. Sold into slavery for a profit, he ends up in Potiphar's household where he finds great success as an estate manager. False accused of attempted rape, Joseph is sent to prison where he continues to find ways to bless those around him. When Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker become his cellmates, he interprets their dreams. God is slowly but surely orchestrating all things for Joseph's good. Including the evil he's endured. Including his suffering and pain and hardship. Joseph will eventually rise to become almost as powerful as Pharaoh himself. He will use his position and influence to save his family. What his brothers intended for evil, God uses for good.

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is still sovereignly at work, orchestrating all things according to His divine purpose and will. Yes, our choices are real. Sinful. Godly. Otherwise. Yes, our suffering is real. So is our success. Yes, our pain is real. So is our joy. Yes, our heartbreak is real. So is the love we experience. God promises to use all these things for our good if we but love and trust Him. He doesn't promise us an easy life. Doesn't promise us a pain-free life. In fact, following Christ in this world will often result in the opposite.

This world is not our home. This world is not what God intended it to be. Humanity is broken. Deeply flawed at a fundamental level. But God still loves humanity. God still intends to work through humanity to bring about salvation to the earth. God will not give up on humanity. He will not give up on you. He will not give up on me. He is at work even now to bring to completion the good work He began in us in Christ. No matter what you are going through. No matter how many switchbacks you take in this life. Know that God is with you. God is leading you. God is guiding you. He wastes no part of your life. He will use it all to bring about your good and His glory.

Readings for tomorrow: [Genesis 41-43](#)

January 23, 2020
NOTHING BUT A DREAMER

Readings for today: [Genesis 41-43](#)

A few years ago, I was in Ethiopia when I met a man whom God had visited several times in a dream. We were in the middle of a training session of several hundred church planters in a village called Gojo up in the highlands of the country. Four and a half hours away from Addis Ababa in a pretty remote area. About halfway through the week, a few of us were walking through the village from where we were staying to our training center when a man approached us. He was dressed head to toe in traditional Muslim tribal garb. Long flowing robes. Head scarf. And he had a long scimitar belted to his hip. We weren't sure what to make of him except that he didn't seem aggressive so we sent for a translator. He told us the most amazing story. Several months previous, he had been visited by Jesus in a dream. Jesus shared the gospel with him and he woke up and gave his life to Christ. He then went around his village preaching Christ to anyone who would hear and the whole village - about 80 people - came to faith. Then he had another dream. Jesus told him to come to this town called Gojo where he would meet people who could teach him the ways of the gospel. So he started walking. And walking. And walking. Turns out he traveled two or three days to get to Gojo where he "happened" to arrive the exact same week we were conducting our training session. It was crazy!

God often speaks to us in our dreams. If we have the ears to hear and the heart to listen. Sometimes those dreams are prophetic in that they tell the future. Sometimes those dreams are prophetic in that they convict us of sin. Sometimes dreams bring to light anxiety and fear that we need to bring to our Heavenly Father. Sometimes our dreams affirm us or reveal the deepest desires of our heart. Joseph was a dreamer. Sheaves of wheat. Stars in the sky. Sun and moon. Clusters of grapes. Baskets of bread. Fat cows and thin cows. And somehow Joseph is able to make sense of it all. Why? Because God was with him!

Over and over again throughout the Joseph "cycle" in Genesis, we see this refrain. "The Lord was with Joseph." "The Lord caused all he did to have success." "The Lord showed steadfast love and gave him favor." Despite all that happens to Joseph, God never leaves his side. And Joseph is faithful in return. "Do not all interpretations belong to God?" "It is not in me, God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." "God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do." Joseph never claims his gift as his own. He always acknowledges God. He always gives all the glory and honor to the Lord. And this blows Pharaoh away. "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" You see, the dreams are really beside the point. They are simply the signposts that point to the greater reality of God!

The same is true of Joseph's life. Yes, he faces hardship. Yes, he experiences tragedy. Yes, he is the victim of injustice. Yes, he languishes in prison. Yes, he also experiences success and wealth and great honor. But again, all these things are really beside the point. Joseph's life - and this is what he really grasps on a deep, deep level - is itself a signpost that points to the greater reality that is God! Joseph's life is itself simply a tool God is using to reveal His steadfast love and faithfulness! All that happens to Joseph is not just for Joseph's sake but for the sake of the greater glory of God, the greater good of God's people, and even the greater welfare of the pagan Egyptians!

So what dreams is God giving you these days? Not just when you are asleep? What dreams and desires has He placed on your heart? Where is He calling you to step out for His greater glory? Your greater good? And the welfare of those around you? As you look back over the course of your life, ask the Spirit to give you the eyes to see where He has been faithful. Where He has been with you. Where He has taken the good, the bad, and the ugly and used it for His purposes.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 44-46

January 24, 2020
THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSPECTIVE

Readings for today: [Genesis 44-46](#)

Perspective. The right perspective. God's perspective. A young man is notified he is being fired from a job he doesn't really like. He is anxious. He's afraid. His pride is hurt. But two months later, he lands a great job. One he loves far more than the one he lost. A young woman just misses the cut at her dream school. She applies over and over again to no avail. She switches gears. Finds a new speciality. Ends up loving what she does. A husband and wife struggle with infertility. For years they try to get pregnant. They go through all the treatments. Nothing seems to work. They adopt. Four beautiful children later, they cannot imagine their family any other way. A single guy longs to be married. He goes on a lot of dates but never seems to find the right woman. Meanwhile, he travels the world preaching the gospel and bringing hope to thousands in the name of Christ. He realizes singleness is a blessing. All these stories are real. All of them involve pain and heartbreak as well as joy and celebration. For some reason, these folks have a resilience about them that allows them to not only survive but thrive. The key is perspective.

For as many people as I've met who seemingly have been able to take lemons and make lemonade, I've met just as many if not more who tend to squeeze the lemon juice into their eyes. They struggle. They battle. They wrestle. Their lives are filled with heartache and suffering and pain. Their decisions end up backfiring. Their choices lead them down the wrong path. Their plans go awry. For every step forward, they take two steps back. And when they come into my counseling office and tell me their stories, I almost never hear God's perspective. That's usually when I tell them the story of Joseph. Joseph had literally been through hell. Sold by his brothers. Falsey accused and imprisoned. Forgotten and left for dead. He could have played the victim. He could have given up. He could have lost hope. Chucked his faith in God. I am sure Joseph suffered. Struggled. Doubted. Grew anxious and afraid as the days passed in prison. (Ancient near east prisons were no joke!) But Joseph persevered. He trusted God. And when he was finally rescued and raised to a powerful position in Egypt and given the perfect chance at revenge...he forgives. He relinquishes his bitterness and anger. He lets go of any need for "eye for an eye" justice. How? He looks at life with God's perspective. "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 45:5-8)

Jesus is clear. In this life we will face trials. In this life we will face hardship. In this life we will suffer and struggle and go through pain. We are fools if we think otherwise. The only way to maintain hope is to keep our eyes fixed on God. To see the world as He sees it. To see life as He sees it. To love as He loves. To serve as He serves. To give our lives as a ransom for many. Just like Jesus. After all, this world is not our home. We are strangers and aliens in this dimension of life, destined for a greater world we can't begin to fathom. When we understand life from God's perspective, everything - including the most difficult experiences of our lives - seems to fall into place. And as much as it hurts, it doesn't have to consume. As much as it confuses, it doesn't have to confound. No matter what you may be going through, let me encourage you to follow Joseph's example. Believe in God. Trust in Christ. Know

that God is at work and He will bring to completion what He is doing in your life for your ultimate good and His ultimate glory.

Readings for tomorrow: Genesis 47-50

January 25, 2020
A FRESH START

Readings for today: [Genesis 47-50](#)

Life has consequences. We all have to face them. We cannot escape them. Yes, there is forgiveness with the Lord. Yes, God's grace is greater than all our sin. Yes, we are accepted and loved unconditionally. But none of that means we escape justice. None of that means we escape the consequences for our actions.

Jacob appears before Pharaoh and when asked to describe his life, he remarks, "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." A lifetime of scheming and manipulating have come back to haunt Jacob in his later years. Yes, he's been forgiven. Yes, God is with him. Yes, God loves him but life has taken a toll.

Jacob's sons appear before him on his deathbed to receive their blessing. Reuben loses his preeminence as the firstborn because he slept with his father's concubine. Simeon and Levi lose their opportunity to lead the family because of their unrestrained violence against Shechem. Authority now passes to Judah who has repented of his actions against Joseph so long ago. After Jacob dies and they return from his funeral, the brothers still live in fear of what Joseph might do and once again beg for forgiveness. Again, they are forgiven. Again, God is with them. Again, God loves them but their actions have consequences. On some level, there will always be fear. Always be shame over what they have done.

The same is true for us. We live our lives before God. Whether we realize it or not, He is always there. And His grace is amazing. His love is unconditional. His mercy knows no end. He loves us for who we are in the midst of all of our imperfections. But sin still has consequences. Our choices impact not only ourselves but those around us. The decisions we make often result in brokenness and pain. The actions we take, the emotions we express, the words we say do have an impact for good or for evil.

Forgiveness doesn't mean pretending those things haven't happened. Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting. No, biblical forgiveness means choosing to no longer hold a person's sinful choices against them. It's an intentional decision to look past the pain, past the heartbreak, past the brokenness into the future. To take a step back and see what God is doing in the midst of it all. This is what Joseph offers his brothers. A fresh start. Not a clean slate. A fresh start.

Where do you need a fresh start today? Who do you need to forgive? Who in your life is suffering from the consequences of their sinful actions and how can you come alongside them? When you look in the mirror what do you see? Does the pain and shame from your past threaten to overwhelm? Perhaps the person you need to forgive is yourself?

January 27, 2020
THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

Readings for today: [Job 1-5](#)

Where is God in the midst of suffering? Why does He allow it? Is He complicit in it? Is there a point to it all? These questions are universal. Every single human being from every culture in every time and place has asked them. And all of the religions of the earth have attempted answers. The pagan witch doctors I've met in Ethiopia believe suffering happens because we displease the gods. We fail to make the right sacrifices. Fail to say the right magical incantations. Fail to humble ourselves before the right gods at the right times in the right ways. So they grow angry and they punish. The gods of the fields withhold their crops. The gods of the weather withhold the rain. The gods of the earth shake the very ground. On the flip side are my Buddhist friends for whom suffering is more of an illusion. A sign we are too tied to the cravings of this world. The way we deal with suffering is meditation which leads to a nirvana-like state that places us beyond suffering altogether. So how do Christians handle suffering?

The Book of Job is one, long extended answer to this important question and it forces us to confront some uncomfortable truths. First, God is sovereign. The Book of Job ultimately is not about Job. All agree Job is righteous. All resonate with Job's suffering. All feel Job's pain. He is us. We are him. Everyone who has experienced deep suffering in their lives can identify with this man. But the Book of Job makes it clear that Job's suffering is not the primary point of the story but rather how his suffering points us to the greater reality of God. It forces us to grapple with God's nature and character. It implicitly and intentionally raises fundamental questions like is God sovereign? And if He is, can He be trusted? Job's life is indeed marked by incredible sorrow and pain. He loses everything he has seemingly overnight. All that he has worked his entire life for is gone in an instant. Including his precious children. It's a brutal scene that plays itself out to this day all over the world. Tragedies strike. Natural disasters hit. Lives are lost and livelihoods go up in smoke. So what are we to make of these things? We certainly struggle to make any sense of them in this world so what Job does is give us a glimpse beyond the dimensions of this life into the dimensions of heaven where a scene is playing out that brings us face to face with the sovereignty of God.

Satan appears before God's throne. He has come from walking to and fro on the earth. Destruction and devastation in his wake. We catch a glimpse here into this fallen angel's pride and arrogance. The very fact that God doesn't obliterate him where he stands is itself stunning. But God has a greater end in mind. A greater purpose. He is going to use humankind (as He always does) to demonstrate His glory and power and victory over Satan and sin and death. So He baits Satan by asking him about Job. Satan takes the bait hook, line and sinker. God, in His majestic sovereignty, allows Satan to go after Job but always within limits. "Behold all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." "Behold, he is in your hand. Only do not take his life." And Satan plays his part with gusto. Relentlessly taking away all that Job has. Relentlessly attacking Job's health and well-being. Job's suffering is so great, his own wife tells him to "curse God and die." His three closest friends don't even recognize him. And yet in all these things, Job did not sin.

What we will learn throughout this book is that what Job treasures most - even amidst his anguish and pain and suffering and anger and questions and doubts and fears - is God Himself. More than his possessions. More than his children. More than his marriage. More than his health. Job treasures God.

Job worships God. As John Piper writes, in the suffering of Job, "the superior worth of God becomes evident to all." What God cares most about is His own glory and our primary role as human beings - creatures made in God's own image - is to bring Him glory and declare His praises in this world and the next. And lest we think we are simply caught up in some divine ego trip, let's remember God is not like us. His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts. He is infinite and we are finite and He sees things from His perspective that we simply cannot know or ever understand.

So where does that leave us? At the mercy of a cold and uncaring God who will strike at us at a whim? No. God loves us. Deeply. Dearly. Completely. And we bring Him great joy when we remain steadfast in our faith amidst our suffering. We bring Him great glory when we praise Him amidst our pain. Imagine the scene in heaven when Job utters his cry of victory, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Imagine the utter shame of Satan as he stands before Lord and the throngs of heaven join Job in his declaration of praise! Imagine his horror as all his evil plans come to naught in the face of true faith! Satan has been defeated!

Now fast forward several centuries. Imagine the same scene playing out before God as Satan comes to test His Son. Imagine the Father giving His Son over into Satan's hands. This time without limits. This time no holds barred. Imagine Satan's delight in the Garden as the Son begs for another way. Imagine Satan's joy as he watches the Son suffer on the Cross. And then imagine Satan's horror as the Son cries out, "It is finished! Into your hands I commit my spirit!" The cry of victorious faith coming at the point of death! Satan is defeated! This time once and for all! As Tim Keller has put it, Jesus is the greater Job who takes on our suffering in order to bring ultimate glory to the Father. And the Father vindicates the Son by raising Him from the dead just He will vindicate Job by restoring all he has and more.

Where you are you struggling today? What suffering have you had to endure in your life? How are you clinging to faith in the midst of it all? Would your perspective change if you saw your life as a trophy through which God displays His glory and grace? Do you believe God is sovereign over your pain? Do you believe God can be trusted even when you suffer?

Readings for tomorrow: Job 6-9

January 28, 2020
READING THE BIBLE RELATIONALLY

Readings for today: [Job 6-9](#)

“Christianity isn’t about rules, it’s about a relationship.” I cannot tell you how many times I’ve said those words. And I believe them with all my heart. However, it wasn’t until I started reading the Bible “relationally” that I really began to grasp the depth of what I was trying to say. One of the real issues we have - and I struggled with it for years myself - when we read the Bible is we tend to approach it from a moralistic perspective. We describe it as a “manual for life” or “God’s playbook” or a roadmap to get your “best life now.” We make the false assumption - down deep - that if we just follow what it says, God will love us. God will be proud of us. God will bless us. The result is we flatten the text. We make it two-dimensional. We become the worst kind of literalists. Instead of reading the Bible for all its worth. Plunging into its emotional depths. Climbing the heights of its majestic poetry and prose. Exploring all the nooks and crannies of every genre. We take and dissect it in a lab. We atomize it and reduce it to its component parts. We rob it of its mystery and glory. This is true for conservatives and progressives alike. They weaponize the text against one another. Proof-texting one another to death. Performing all sorts of exegetical gymnastics to make the text say what they want it to say. God must be shaking His head.

Job - more than any other book - shows us the best way to read the Bible. Job spends his whole life worshipping God. He is blameless before the Lord. He is scrupulous in his behavior. He is as upright a man as they come. He even makes sacrifices on behalf of his children just in case they stumble and fall. Through it all, Job is building a deep and abiding relationship with God that will hold up under the harshest of tests. Job’s life is upended in ways many of us cannot even fathom. The loss of all his children and grandchildren. The loss of all his wealth and power and privilege. The loss of his health and well-being. (By the way, this book puts a stake in the heart of prosperity preaching!) Job loses everything. His own wife encourages him to curse God and die.

But Job understands something his wife and all his friends do not. He has a relationship with God. A real relationship. An authentic relationship. The kind of relationship where one can say anything. The kind of relationship where one can question and doubt and struggle and wish to die. Job trusts God with the rawest of emotions. Job trusts God with his anger and fear. Job trusts God enough to question his justice and demand an account. Like Abraham before him and Moses after him, Job understands what God wants is not a rule-follower so much as a friend. Someone to speak with face to face. Someone to walk with in the Garden in the cool of the day just as He once did with Adam.

Friends, God’s love forms the foundation of our relationship with Him. God’s faithfulness makes our relationship secure. God holds us in the palm of His hands and He promises nothing can separate us from His love. God sealed this promise with Abraham when He walked through the halves of the animals to establish the covenant. God stayed true to this promise when He sent His own Son to die on a cross. He will never, ever let us go!

Because God’s love is so fierce and loyal and true, we can be ourselves with Him. Our truest and most authentic selves. We can share anything with Him. We can get mad at Him. We can weep with Him. We can crawl into His lap when we are afraid. We can run to Him after we fall. We can come to Him

when we sin. We can be demanding and spoiled and proud and foolish and God will never stop loving us. Never stop embracing us. Never cut off His relationship with us.

We will not always understand why things happen the way they do. We will not always know the reasons why God allows bad things to happen to good people and good things to happen to bad people. We do not need to try to justify God or defend God or speak for God like Job's friends. He is perfectly capable of doing those things on His own! Our responsibility is to follow Job's example. Be real. Be honest. Be authentic before the Lord and then ultimately trust and surrender and submit to His sovereign will.

The only reason Job was able to endure the test is because he spent his whole life building his relationship with God. He spent his whole life in worship. He cultivated an awareness of God in his everyday. He intentionally walked with God on a daily basis. How does this look in your life? In what ways are you intentionally walking with God? Are you spending time with Him everyday? Do you gather with His people every week? Do you have a small group you can be real and honest with about your sin? Do you find ways to serve? A relationship with God is built the same way all relationships are built. Time and intentionality. If you haven't already, begin making time for God today!

Readings for tomorrow: Job 10-13

January 29, 2020
THE POWER OF LISTENING

Readings for today: [Job 10-13](#)

Job's friends were doing so well. Word gets out about all Job has suffered and they come running. They grieve with him. They weep with him. They sit with him in the dust and ashes of his tragic life. For seven days, they silently keep vigil. For seven days, their presence is a comfort. For seven days, they faithfully love and care for their dear friend. Then they open their mouths...

What is it about us that makes us so prone to rush to judgment? To refuse to hear someone out? To listen to their story in full? What is it about us that feels the need to jump in? Cut people off? Interrupt? I remember when my wife first met my family. One of the first things that struck her was how often we interrupted each other. Arguing was our love language. Three strong-willed brothers going at it all the time, pontificating on every subject imaginable. Most of it was hot air, of course. We were clueless. Ignorant. Foolish. Even when we were correct, it didn't matter, because our goal was to be right. To win the argument. To pump our own tires and make ourselves feel good.

I think about my brothers when I read the Book of Job. When I hear the arguments Job's friends make in response to Job's heartbreakingly cries. They are more interested in correcting his theology than comforting his soul. They are more interested in defending God than demonstrating love. They feel compelled to justify Job's suffering as if getting to the root cause will ease his pain. I see it all the time. In the midst of great tragedy or crisis, so many people want to know why? Why did this happen? Why now? Why me? Why didn't God protect me or those I love? When I was young and foolish, I tried to answer these questions. I would sit with grieving families thinking my theological answers would bring them peace. Thankfully, I learned quickly from my mistakes. The better approach was simply to listen. To put my arms around them. To simply sit in the ashes and resist the temptation to offer explanations.

Regardless of what people say, the question they really are asking is where is God? Is He with me in the midst of my pain? Is He here with me at the bedside of the one I love? Is He in the room? Does He hear my cries? Does He weep with me? The central truth of Christianity is this...God is with us. Jesus is Emmanuel. We are never alone. God traveled the vast reaches of our universe to be with us. He left heaven and came to earth to become one of us. He entered human history. Became flesh and blood and moved into our neighborhood. All so that we would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are loved.

Friends, you are blessed. You have access to a truth Job could only long for. You have Jesus. He is with you in your pain. He is with you in your heartache. He is with you in your grief. He is with you in suffering. He's not here to blame. He's not here to condemn. He's not here to put the burden on you or remind you of the consequences of your actions. He is here to hold you. He is here to comfort you. He is here to offer you grace.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 14-17

January 30, 2020
RESURRECTION HOPE

Readings for today: [Job 14-17](#)

The hope of a Christian is resurrection. Our physical bodies rising from the ground. A life after death. Even more, a life after life after death. A day that dawns when our souls indwell our bodies once more and God raises us imperishable and indestructible once and for all. Without this hope, death wins. Without this hope, it is tough to endure the struggles of this world. Without this hope, we despair if we're completely honest. And this is where Job finds himself this morning.

"But a man dies and is laid low; man breathes his last, and where is he? As waters fail from a lake and a river wastes away and dries up, so a man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep." (Job 14:10-12)

"My spirit is broken; my days are extinct; the graveyard is ready for me...My days are past; my plans are broken off, the desires of my heart....If I hope for Sheol as my house, if I make my bed in darkness, if I say to the pit, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'My mother,' or 'My sister,' where then is my hope? Who will see my hope? Will it go down to the bars of Sheol? Shall we descend together into the dust?" (Job 17:1, 11, 13-16)

The Bible is written as a progressive revelation. God doesn't reveal everything about Himself and His plan on the first page. As God's people interact with God over time, they learn. They grow in their understanding of who He is and what He's about. They also come to an understanding of who they are and what they are about. Resurrection is a later development in Jewish theology. It doesn't truly come to its fullest expression until the "intertestamental" period or the period between the Old and New Testaments. The apocryphal books of the Maccabees bear witness to a growing belief by the Jews as they face severe persecution under the pagan Antiochus Epiphanes that if Yahweh chooses not to rescue them in this life, it's because He is planning to rescue them in a life to come.

Resurrection was a matter of debate even in the 1st century. It was a particular point of tension between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection which is why they are "Sad U See." :-) The Pharisees, on the other hand, held to a robust belief in the resurrection of God's people. When Jesus rose from the dead, it sent shock waves through the Jewish community. The empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances combined to launch a new Jewish sect called Christianity. Unlike the Sadducees, Christians believed in the resurrection from the dead. Unlike the Pharisees, Christians believed Jesus was the "first-fruits" of the resurrection to come and those who followed Him were filled with His resurrection power.

Why does this matter? What difference does it make? Well, if you don't believe in the resurrection, it makes suffering unbearable. Useless. Pointless. If we are just atoms and dust then there is no meaning or purpose to life. Not really. There is no such thing as good or evil. Not really. Such ideas are merely cultural constructs that carry no eternal weight. The Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection so they became the primary collaborators with Rome. Active participants in the oppression of their own people. The Pharisees did believe in the resurrection so they did everything they could to keep the Law of God and remain ritually pure. They were some of Rome's fiercest critics and refused to

compromise lest they put their eternal fate in jeopardy. Christians knew the resurrection was real and therefore willingly laid down their lives for the sake of the poor and marginalized and sick and dying. They understood this life was but a shadow of the life to come and didn't hold onto the things of this world. They freely gave away all their wealth. Freely shared all they had. Freely gave of themselves.

The reading from Job today presses the question...where do we find hope? Is it in this life? Or the next? Do our lives reflect a deep and abiding trust in God to redeem? To rescue? To save? How tightly do we hold onto our health and wealth and reputation? Do we see these things for the temporary realities that they are and dare we live for eternal rewards?

Readings for tomorrow: Job 18-21

January 31, 2020
MY REDEEMER

Readings for today: Job 18-21

In the midst of his terrible suffering, Job holds fast to three fundamental convictions...

- God is sovereign.
- God is good and just.
- Job is faithful.

These convictions give him the strength to resist his friends when they offer their simplistic, superficial, and ultimately heretical explanations. They also give him the courage to stand before the judgment seat of God, trusting the Lord for vindication. We see this reflected in what are perhaps the most famous verses in the Book of Job, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!” (Job 19:25-27) Job, of course, has no idea who Jesus is. The life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God will not be revealed for many centuries. But Job does have faith. He looks forward, as do all the Old Testament saints, to a future yet to be revealed, trusting in a God who will make all things right and all things new.

Job’s suffering resists all logic. It resists any and all attempts to make sense out of it. It resists the formulaic notions we have about cause and effect. Blessing and curse. Health and wealth. It forces us to grapple with the hard truth that the righteous do suffer. The unrighteous do prosper. Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to evil people. There is no rhyme or reason to these things. Time and chance happen to us all as the writer of Ecclesiastes once wrote. The world we live in is broken. Utterly. Completely. It is a world enslaved to the power of Sin. A world ruled by the tyrannical fear of Death. If things happen to go well for us in this world, it is not because we are good or because we earned it. It is far more likely that it is random chance. This is why we cannot set our hearts on the things of this earth but on things above.

A friend of mine recently watched a show where the Book of Job was featured. The conclusion of the character who was wrestling with the text was that ultimately all Job received in the end was new children and a case of PTSD. That’s actually a common interpretation of the text both in our culture today and in many churches. Like Job’s friends, it’s a far too simplistic approach to the text. It betrays our unwillingness to really sit and take the time to “hear” Job. To marvel at his courageous faith. To wonder at his steadfast, some may call it stubborn, refusal to let go of the goodness and justice and sovereignty of God. Why doesn’t Job ever throw in the towel? Why doesn’t Job do what his wife suggested at the beginning? Why doesn’t Job curse God and die like so many have throughout the centuries and like so many do today? Because Job believes. Job has faith. He knows his Redeemer lives! He knows he will meet God face to face after he dies! He trusts God to be faithful! Trusts God to be sure! Trusts God to be true! Trusts God to be good! And though it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God, Job ultimately trusts God for his vindication.

Readings for tomorrow: Job 22-24