

Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

Bible 101, Part I

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Hey everybody. My name is Katie Patrizio, and I'm really excited to be joining you for this online Advent retreat this year. What I want to do with you in our time together is basically try to paint a picture for you of the Jewish world into which Jesus was born, and to give you a sense, that maybe you can assume yourself, a sense of the longing and the excitement that the Jewish people had in awaiting the Messiah, in awaiting Jesus. Before we begin with that though, I think we should start with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Dear Lord, we thank You for bringing us together in this online community, and giving us the opportunity to grow closer to You and learn more about You in this retreat. We pray that You would breath Your wisdom upon us, and help us to grow in knowledge of You. And in growing in knowledge of You, that we might grow in love of You and love of our neighbor. We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, really, to do what I want to do with you, which is to give you a big background, lots of background, but helpful background on the history of the Jewish people and the longing that they had for the Messiah, we are going to have to consult, which I love, a lot of this book, the bible. And to do what I want to do adequately, we're actually going to have to go right back to the very beginning of the bible to the beginning of the story, the story of what theologians call salvation history. And to do that and not lose our place in scripture, we're going to rely on a notion that is going to be the key to understanding scripture, and it's going to be the red thread that runs through all of scripture. And that notion, that idea, that key, that red thread is called the covenant, a covenant.

What is a covenant? Maybe you've heard the term before, maybe you haven't. Sometimes it shows up on legal paperwork. Nevertheless, I'll give you a brief definition of a covenant. A covenant is an extension of kinship by oath. An extension of kinship by oath. So kinship means family. And so, in other words, a covenant makes family. A covenant is distinct from a contract, this is helpful, because a contract is an exchange of goods or services, whereas a covenant is an exchange of persons. And so what we have all throughout scripture is covenants, and in fact arguably all of scripture is God, all of salvation history is God extending a covenant to us.

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I'll elucidate the idea a little bit more by offering you 2 examples of covenant still present and practiced in our society today. Maybe you can think of them. Those are marriage covenants and adoptive covenants. So marriage and adoption are both forms of covenants that we still practice in society today. How are they covenants? Well, think with me through the idea of marriage. In a marriage, 2 people who are not related to one another, hopefully - that's kind of my standard joke - come together either in a church or a civic place, if they're being married by the Justice of the Peace, and they swear an oath to one another. And in swearing this oath to one another, they become family.

And they don't just become a form of family, but arguably they become the most intimate form of family that we respect in society today. You don't go up to a husband and a wife and say "Well, you don't share blood, therefore you're not family." In fact, it seems to be quite the opposite, our culture's understanding of the power of the marriage covenant. We believe in many ways that a husband and wife actually have the most intimate form of kinship, of familial relationship. That's the power of a covenant.

Adoption I said is the other example of covenant that we have in society today. And in adoption, 2 people, again, typically an adult and a minor, swear an oath. This oath is typically on paper, but it's an oath nonetheless. And in swearing this oath to each other, this adoptive mother or father takes a child who is not their own, and that child, in swearing this adoptive oath, becomes a son or a daughter of this adoptive mother or father. And I'm not a lawyer, but I've been told that our society ascribes so much power to this covenant that, should an adoptive mother or father, for whatever reason, want to marry their adoptive son or daughter when they become of age, it's not allowed. It's not allowed because they already, those 2 people already have a covenant. They're already family. So even though they're not blood related, they cannot swear, they cannot make themselves any more a family than they already are. Again, the power of the covenant, right?

Covenant. The term covenant isn't explicitly on the first few pages, so you won't hear the Hebrew word for covenant in Genesis 1, 2, or 3, but it's there implicitly, and it's there powerfully. So let me explain. If you remember back to the creation account - so we're really in the first pages of the scripture, Genesis chapter 1 - it tells us God creates the world in 7 days. The root of that Hebrew word for 7 is also the root of the Hebrew word for covenant. So God doesn't just create the world, but He actually covenants the world into existence. He creates man in this familial bond, and that's why we can hear the scriptures talk about someone like Adam as a son of God. We talked about the power of a covenant. God covenants man into existence. He creates him in this intimate family bond.

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Unfortunately, that serendipitous sort of situation doesn't last very long. So if you get past the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, quickly thereafter we come to Genesis 3, which is the account of The Fall. And here I want to rely a little bit more on the scripture text itself and on my bible to tease out some of those things. So, first of all, God forbids Adam and Eve to eat a particular fruit: the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It's got lots of prepositions in it. But He has already given the permission to eat of the fruit of the trees of the rest of the garden. So God has been very generous here.

Something else that's interesting, we hit a detail in Genesis chapter 2 that tells us that when God planted the Garden in Eden, that He made lots of trees to grow, and that these trees were pleasant to the sight and good for food. Pleasant to the sight and good for food. When we jump to Genesis 3 and we get the description of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, it tells us that that tree and the fruit of that tree is also good for food and a delight to the eyes, but it has this third that's really interesting: it's desirable to make one wise. Wisdom is often associated with God, and so you'll hear theologians say that the temptation that Adam and Eve had was a temptation to be like God. To have that wisdom.

What else can we say about The Fall that we read about in scripture? Well, we have the serpent, Satan, who comes and tempts Adam and Eve. He asks Eve "What did God tell you about this tree?" And Eve tells the command that God gave: ***"You shall not eat of any tree of the garden. We may eat,"*** the woman says, I'm at verse 2, ***"We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but God said 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"***

So the serpent has asked "Tell me more. Tell me more about this tree that God forbade you to eat from." Eve says, she repeats the commandment: ***"You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die."*** And then the serpent, in verse 4, he contracts actually what God says. He says ***"That's not true; you will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be open and you will be like God."*** Again, we get that notion of Adam and Eve perhaps wanting to be like God. And so it tells us that they do, they take advantage of this possibility, and they eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Sometimes, this is one of my favorite things to talk about in this section, sometimes we have this idea that Eve was off on her own and that Adam was off on his own, and that the serpent was solely talking to Eve. And so sometimes we give Eve more blame in this situation than we give Adam. I don't think we should give one party more blame than another, but I think we need to pay attention to the

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text in scripture. It tells us that Eve took of the fruit and ate, and she also gave some of the fruit to her husband with her. Some translations of scripture leave out those 2 words “with her,” but in the original Hebrew they are there. “Her husband with her,” and he ate.

So the implication is that Adam is not somewhere else - in fact, he's there with Eve - but he's remaining silent. Which is all the more concerning when you remember, you really pay attention to Genesis 1 and 2, and you remember that the commandment not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was actually given to Adam before Eve was created. So, honestly, when we're talking about an authority who can answer the question of the serpent, it probably would have rested on Adam, since he was the one who had actually received the commandment from God. But Adam does not answer this question. He leaves it to Eve to answer this question, and remains silent. So he's silently complicit in this whole ordeal. And so not only does Eve contribute to The Fall, or participate in The Fall, or fall, if you will, but Adam does as well. And so this is really problematic.

At this point, we can transition into God's response to The Fall. And the first thing that God says after The Fall is really, really telling. He says “Where are you? Where are you?” That's what God says. It's interesting because it tells us, this beautiful phrase, tells us that God's first concern after The Fall is man's proximity to Himself. God's first concern after The Fall is man's proximity to Himself. If we continue reading, we'll eventually get to Genesis 3:15, which is what theologians call the Protevangelium. So it's this verse that's embedded in kind of the curses that God issues after The Fall, and I'll say something about that real quick: We don't want to think that God issues curses out of anger or out of punishment. Rather, oftentimes the curses that God issues are actually God saying what is naturally going to happen because of the action that you took.

So, for example, we're told that Eve will have, and women in general, will have pain in child-bearing, and also that men now will have to toil to bring forth food from the earth, which didn't used to be the case before The Fall. It's kind of crazy to think about. But embedded in that is this famous phrase, this Protevangelium, Genesis 3:15, where God says, and He's speaking to the serpent here. He says ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed.” “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed.”*** This is called the Protevangelium, which I haven't told you yet what that means. The Protevangelium, that means “first gospel” in Latin.

This text is called the first gospel. Well, gospel means good news. So it's the first time after The Fall God is giving a good news, and it occurs really quickly after

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The Fall, which is really heartening. And this promise is that there will be enmity, complete separation between the offspring of the woman and between the serpent, okay. If we're familiar with the story of salvation, we'll already start to get a glimpse. We can look into the future and understand that maybe this is a reference to Mary and to Jesus, alright.

If we jump down, there's 2 more things I want to point out to you in talking about the account of The Fall. It tells us that God clothed Adam and Eve in garments of skin. If you remember earlier, right after The Fall, it tells us that Adam and Eve's eyes were opened, and they saw that they were naked, and so they sewed themselves fig leaves, which I imagine were probably poor pieces of clothing. So God in His mercy gives Adam and Eve clothes, garments of skin. I won't say too much about this except to say that it's interesting to consider the fact that an animal would have had to have been slaughtered to cover up the nakedness caused by sin. This kind of, theologians will say, prefigures a little bit the temple sacrifice. The sacrifice of animals to cover up the repercussions of sin, right. Just an interesting thing to consider.

The last thing I want to point out is that, at the very end of chapter 3, Genesis chapter 3, God decides to drive Adam and Eve out of the garden, and for the reason specifically that they do not eat of the Tree of Life. This can sound really scandalous, considering that everything we have been saying is that basically, because of The Fall, Adam and Eve have lost some of their life. That's the traditional view of The Fall. And in relating that to the notion of covenant, they've separated themselves from that familial bond with God, okay. So why would God refuse to allow Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Life? In fact, wouldn't He want them to eat of the Tree of Life in this circumstance?

Many theologians say that the Tree of Life would give immortality, but what's interesting to consider is that had Adam and Eve eaten of the tree of life and become immortal, they would have become immortal in their sinful and prone-to-suffering state of being, which would have been totally horrible. It basically would have been like you and I being immortal, but in this world full of suffering and sickness. And I'm sure we've heard of people who have lived a full life and they talk about just being ready to go home. Could you imagine if you couldn't?

But what I want to point out here is this paradox, and it's one of the great paradoxes of Christianity that we're going to see again at the end of scripture, which is that because Adam and Eve do not eat of the Tree of Life, death becomes the source of life. Because death allows us to move beyond this world of suffering and pain and to enter into a world of beatitude. In the meantime though, in our story where we are, Adam and Eve have fallen, they've lost that familial bond with

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God, and they've been driven out of the garden. So when we pick up next time, we will look at what God tries to do in response to The Fall, and basically what He does is to raise up Noah and his family. So when we come back we'll take a closer look at Noah, and then we'll just continue on through the story. Thanks so much for listening.