

Beginnings: New Beginnings

November 20, 2016

Introduction / Big Joy Preview

- Heading into the Christmas season we will spend time in Luke's Gospel, which says that Jesus' arrival is "good news of great joy for all people".
- Today we conclude our time in Genesis 1-3 and *Beginnings* series.

Last Week

- We are our stories. We are history beings. We take the incoherent happenings of life and make neat narratives out of it. We share the most important stuff.
- So it is vital to get our story straight, particularly the beginning of our story as it makes sense of, or is the foundation for, the rest.
- The beginning sets the course. It points us in the right direction.

Why Genesis?

- We've spent this time in Genesis because it's vital we assess our assumptions, and are on the right course. And it's a chance, if need be, to course correct, or to reconsider our foundation, check to see if it's faulty, and re-lay it if need be. We've spent time in Genesis so as to compare our stories to this one.
- Doing this kind of thing forces us to do what we may neglect to amidst the bills and diapers and papers and laundry and hospital visits and internet browsing. We're taking time to identify our stories.
- Often many of us wander around living out of a story we've adopted without question and an identity we've accepted without scrutiny.
- Spending time in Genesis together is intended to help us ask questions like:
 - What is the story I've been living out of?
 - Who do I think I am?
 - Who do I think God is?
 - What do I think my purpose is?

- This kind of reflection is of monumental importance. And when we begin to ask these questions, and allow the scriptures to inform the answers, that's when the real healing and adventure begins.

Taking a beat – Joining Jesus in his Story (The Lord's Prayer)

- Prayer can be defined many ways. One way to define might be to call it "taking a beat" or "pressing pause".
- This is exactly what prayer is. It's pressing pause, sitting or walking with God (because this is a relationship after all) and remembering our story so we can live out of it and navigate appropriately. In part, prayer is aligning yourself with God.
- One of the very best ways to do that is to *join Jesus* in the prayer he gave his first followers. When we do this we simply joining Jesus in his story.
- One way we can adopt the Genesis is by praying the Lord's Prayer, and it's why we've attempted to incorporate the prayer into the *Beginnings* series as much as we have.
- For Christians, growth is often simply a consistent revision of the basics. As clever as we think we are, and as much we assume about our stories, a growing Christian will return to the simple truths again and again. And will need to their entire lives.
- So what we'll do today is walk through the prayer a final time, in consideration of the story we've been told in Genesis, and ask that God help us own this story, and discard old ones if need be.

Our Father in heaven, holy is your name

- The Lord's Prayer begins with "Our" and not "My", because following Jesus is (categorically) communal and impossible to do otherwise.
- This is a subversive truth today when excessive individualism gives way to all manner of egocentric views. It is easy to believe that "me" should win over "we", and in the West we're told this hundred times a day.

- But the Genesis story and the Jesus story reads that togetherness is part of God's created order and being human can't be done in isolation.
- In fact, do you remember the one negative statement God makes in Genesis 1? He call everything good but says what? *It's not good for man to be alone.*
- This is a comfort for some of us, and an offence to others. To live in this story means to live in the reality that all people are made in God's likeness and will mean a dying to self if we're to love each other as brothers and sisters, as children of one Father.
- Thankfully, such love is modeled by Our Father.
- But this can be difficult to do if you've got the wrong idea about who Dad is.
- Which leads us to the next part of this prayer.
- Some of us had good parents, some of us had bad parents, still others never met our parents. These experiences will inform our view of God.
- Genesis describes an involved, creative, bountiful, self-giving Father God who creates a garden called "delight" for his children to thrive in together.
- So part of praying these words and living out of this story, is honestly asking ourselves who we believe God is and what he is like.
- Genesis doesn't begin with a list of laws about the universe, it begins with an introduction to a Person. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray (a relational act), to converse with God, all with the understanding that the story begins not with a what, a where, a how or a why, but a "who".
- Some of us need a **new beginning**, and this is precious where we need to start. Our story won't be straight if we don't know who he really is and who we really are. If all we can do is that, we'll be doing very well.
- So if it's dawning on you that you may carry around some misconceptions about the main character of the story, might I suggest paying great attention in the coming season. Which says....
- God is not tyrannical, distant, cruel or self-serving. He is kind, overtly benevolent, accessible and keenly interested in living where we live. Why

else would he choose to be laid in an food trough for animals, share meals around tables, or die on a cross?

- There's no one like God. We can find good examples of his character, but even the sweetest cookie-baking grandmother false short of his good nature, which is what makes him so holy.
- Holiness, can in part be defined as distinctness. God is profoundly distinct, unlike any other. We must start our story there, with him.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

- One of the reasons I love the prayer Jesus gives us is that once we've established who God is and who we are, we are immediately reminded of the geographical and structural reality in Genesis.
- The world is God's temple and we are placed in it care for and sustain it. God has a way of doing things, which we often need to be shown, and have been so by Jesus' example.
- So when Jesus prays this, we remember that God is on the move, and has always intended to reside in his home, his temple, here.
- And so our part in the story is not to try and build our own little kingdoms, our temples but to make way for his kingdom, and open our eyes to see the temple we're living in.
- So the Christian life is a resignation to God's will with complete trust in his character that he has what's best for the cosmos and knows what he's doing!
- Consider King Herod in Matthew's gospel. Herod was a man who wanted to be king. Jesus is the King, who became man. Herod's part in the Christmas story reminds us that pride produces darkness and death. Jesus' part reminds us that humility produces light and life.
- The truth is, like Herod, we are all pretenders to the throne strutting around in paper crowns.
- What Christmas says, and Easter and the entire story of scripture points to, is that God has moved in and continuing to move in, though our lives.

- The carol we'll be singing soon says it perfectly: *let every heart prepare him room...*
- "Your kingdom come and will be done" is both a liberating and difficult thing to pray. I know it is what's best, what I'm made for, but it also means I'll be dethroned!
- The burden of being the master of your own life is heavy and the pressure is immense. We were never meant to carry that. We are dependent beings, needy ones. The sooner we accept that the better. When this happens we find our rightful place and begin to thrive. I find my true purpose as a person.
- Which leads us to the next part of the prayer.

Give us our bread for today, and forgive our debts as we forgive those indebted against us

- When we let God be God, his kingdom becomes our kingdom, and rest in our identity of his children, we will stop trying to earn our bread, and tax our neighbour.
- Genesis says that God is the giver, the provider, and we, first and foremost are receivers. He gave abundantly in the garden, provided bread in the desert and came as Jesus, the bread from heaven.
- We're fooling ourselves if we really think we can ultimately provide for ourselves. So Jesus's example is prayer is made to measure for us.
- God provides, we don't have to earn. We can and should ask for what we need.
- And what we need most, even if we don't always remember it, is God's presence. The abundance of his Spirit in our lives. Genesis says it's how we're designed to live – that God breathed life into the humans – his Spirit.
- This then allows us to do all the forgiving stuff. Jesus' grace and presence fills us so we no longer have to take from others to be sustained, we can give.
- This is where others of us need a **new beginning**.

- We can actually quit trying to provide for ourselves, and ask God for the bread. Ask God for his Spirit.
- Some of us walk around living out of a story of un-forgiveness and blame, and it's time to burn that script, and pick up a new one.
 - God doesn't kill Adam and Eve but clothes them with a new grace after the fall in the Garden. (Gen 3.21)
 - Jesus tells Peter to forgive abundantly. (Matt 18.22)
- That new script reads that God is filling you with his healing presence, so you can let go of what you need to in order to move forward.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

- What went wrong in the garden with Adam and Eve, Jesus put write in the Garden called Gethsemane. Jesus endured testing in his story. He entered a world gone wrong to put it right, and this required resolve.
- He endured the temptation to decline the cup offered him, and took on evil, giving us victory on the cross.
- So, we can pray for deliverance because Jesus chose not to deliver himself.
- In light of this, we can't share Jesus story, and the Genesis story, if we don't recognize the world for what it is. The world first of all good, but it also now tainted by evil. We live in that mixed bag.
- Thanks to Jesus, that's not the end of the story.
 - "This prayer, in its setting within the whole Lord's Prayer, keeps the proper balance. Jesus intends his followers to recognize not only the reality of evil but the reality of his victory over it. Evil is real and powerful. It is not only 'out there', in other people, but it is present and active within each of us....But Jesus' victory over evil is also real and powerful. It, too, is not only 'out there', a fact of history two thousand years ago, but it is available here and now for each of us." (NT Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer*)

- This part of the prayer and the story is where we find ourselves every day, as we wait for God's *new* creation to arrive, for every wrong to be put right. What do we do?
- We begin with welcoming God's kingdom, through prayer.
 - "This is the part of the prayer for the Kingdom: it is the prayer that the forces of destruction, of dehumanization, of anti-creation, of anti-redemption, may be bound and gagged, and that God's good world may escape from being sucked down into their morass. It is our responsibility, as we pray this prayer, to hold God's precious and precarious world before our gaze, to sum up its inarticulate cries for help, for rescue, for deliverance. Deliver us from the horror of war! Deliver us from human folly and the appalling accidents it can produce! Let us not become a society of rich fortresses and cardboard cities! Let us not be engulfed by social violence, or by self-righteous reaction! Save us from the arrogance and pride and the awful things they make people do! Save us – from ourselves...and Deliver us from the Evil One." (NT Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer*)
- So we pray. But we also.... speak up, we act up, we do and say something when evil is esteemed - we hold up the weak, feed the hungry, clothe the exposed, care for the sick, we visit the prisoner, and defend the downtrodden.
- When we pray like this and live like this, embrace our true story. A story that says it began with God's goodness and it will end that way too.
- Maybe we need a **new beginning** here. Maybe we're afraid, or distraught at the state of the world these days. We can be honest about evil, but we needn't wallow in it.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

- One week away from the season of Advent let's consider the words of Paul to the church in Corinth.
- "On him we have set our hope..." (2 Corinthians 1.10)

Discussion Questions

- What have you learned in the series that has most influenced your outlook on God, the world and yourself?
- What has encouraged you? What has challenged you?
- How do we identify our stories? What are good ways of doing that?
- What next steps might we take to live out of this story?