

Since the Autumn of 2006, we have been working with a teaching/preaching scheme which has been helpful for us as a congregation, and, I believe, honouring to God. Sunday by Sunday we preach systematically through a book of the Bible, according to a reading plan. That plan is given here should you be interested. I have called it “**Open Heart, Open Bible**”, because this can never be an academic exercise only. Each week I make commentary style notes available (no more than 7 chapters) from the book we are reading, and in preaching the aim is to inspire people to be reading the Scriptures as we go. We are endeavouring to build our fellowship through small groups, and those groups use the material from the notes or the preaching as it is given. The believers in the early church devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, and we are seeking to build our own corporate life around these same spiritual essentials. We are experiencing times of refreshing as we do.

Open Heart, Open Bible

Genesis and Luke’s Gospel

Linking Theme: Covenant

Bible passage for weekly reading (week 1):

Genesis Ch’s 1&2

Creation – Cosmos and close-up

As evangelical believers in the Christian gospel, we find ourselves very much on the defensive in trying to share our faith in an environment of intellectual cynicism. One of the important reasons for this is the belief that the Bible is an outdated Book, and that “science” has largely discredited it. The Biblical account of beginnings is very different from anything taught in our places of education, and many believers have been so influenced by this that the last hundred and fifty years or so have seen attempts by some theologians and Bible teachers to make the popular notions fit the Scriptures. My approach in writing these notes is to allow the Word of God to speak for itself as it unfolds, chapter by chapter. John Wesley often said that we must let scripture interpret scripture if we are to gain a right understanding from the Bible. This is the nature of the task.

There are three things I want to comment on as we read Genesis ch.1. First is the correct definition of the word “day” from the original Hebrew, secondly the fact that after each stage in the process of creation, God saw that what He had done “**was good**”, and thirdly, that in creating life on earth, He created living things “**according to their kinds**”.

A) Defining the word “day” – **God called the light “day” and the darkness He called “night”** (1v.5). The word “day” is used repeatedly in the creation account, fourteen times in all. The Hebrew word is “yom”, as in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. A literal day, or the length of daylight, is the overwhelming meaning of the word throughout scripture, although it can sometimes be used to mean an undefined length of time when something is characterising that period (i.e.- the “day” of wrath, Prov.11 v.4, or the “day” of disaster, Prov.16 v.4).

Some say that the word “day” is symbolic, that it is used merely to help us to understand what God did, but because He is out of time, the word merely represents the length of time it actually took the Creator. We are told, however, that after each day there was “morning” and there was “evening”. Are these words also symbolic? And what of the “night”? If the day is not a literal day, what are we to make of these other words? The straightforward interpretation of what we have here is a clearly established cycle of days and nights, and this is how our Creator intended it to be. Read Exodus 20 v.11, words which were given to Moses from the very mouth of God at Sinai. In this context, the order of creation is illustrative of the rhythm of life which He wants for His people. Six-day creation and a day of rest and worship is on the heart of God in doing things the way He did. Jesus Himself gave some insight into this in saying that “**the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath**” (Mark 2 v.21). The Creator’s desire in all of this was to form a people for Himself who would worship Him, in an environment in which He could take perpetual delight. All created things are for His pleasure (Prov.8 v.31; Rev. 4 v.11).

The order of creation is also of great importance in God’s handiwork. Light (day1) is followed by sky, dry ground and seas (2), vegetation and plant-life (3), by the planets (4), by birds and fish (5), and by animals and man (6). This small earth is the centre of the universe as far as God is concerned! The earth came first, the home of His living creation in general, and of His special creation in particular - mankind - who alone had the ability to respond to him and to worship Him, the one who would look after the others! Only after the other planets had been set in place were the living creatures given breath, and the earth was now ready to receive them. Those who would take the long-age view of the days to harmonise with the eons of evolutionary thought have a great difficulty here insofar as the evolutionist takes a different view of the order of things appearing – the sun is said to come into being before the earth, which was initially just a molten blob. Life started in the oceans, then plants, then land animals, then birds. Man and winged creatures are held to have evolved from land animals. There is no correlation whatever between the two approaches!

Lastly, there is the phrase used in v.14, where “seasons, days and years” are referred to in relation to the solar system. Obviously, day in this context means a literal day. To give it symbolic meaning whenever it is used in the chapter

elsewhere would seem to be wrongly inconsistent in our quest for Godly understanding.

B) God saw that it was good. This phrase is used repeatedly after each day's work, from day two onwards. God was satisfied that there was no flaw in what He was doing. On the seventh time, at the end of the chapter, He looks on the finished work, and saw that it was very good. His work reflects His nature. It speaks of love, peace and trustful interdependence in a wonderful synthesis of ordered perfection.

Many Christian believers, in accepting conclusions which are allegedly scientific, have added them to the Biblical account and then said that God took millions of years to make everything. These ideas are variously known as "theistic evolution" or "progressive creation". Prior to either of these was an explanation called the "gap theory", which postulated that a gap in time exists between Genesis 1v.1 and 1v.2, which could well have been millions of years in our appreciation of time, and which period ended in a divine judgment, hence the completely water-covered earth. It makes no attempt to explain why there was no sky!

The big theological difficulty with these various long-age theories is that they hold to the idea that death, disease and destruction took place before the fall of man as described in Genesis ch.3. It is stated that the fossil record shows it. If this is so, then the world was certainly not "very good" when God finished His creative work. Below its surface lay evidence of untold suffering. Biblically, we understand that the creation was indeed perfect, but that the first man rebelled, and it was at that point that sin, death, disease and fear entered into human experience. The entire New Testament can only be understood on that basis, from the teaching of Jesus to the Revelation of John. Genesis 1 speaks of a new creation that in the minutest detail was "very good". There was no death, no killing, no pain and no suffering in this world, animals were not killed for food, neither did they prey on each other (both man and animals were vegetarian – v.'s 29&30). Think of the attributes of God as revealed in Jesus, the "second Adam" as Paul calls Him. He cared for the sick, and healed them. He helped the poor and needy, He drove out demons and did many other works of compassion. His goodness personified His Father's goodness. Compare that with the basic premise of evolutionary thought – elimination of the weak, survival of the fittest, death and disease in the evolving life-cycle. Would the God of love that we know be behind this sort of "progress" and call it "good"?

Lastly, and most importantly, we know that Jesus was "the Lamb slain from the creation of the world" (1 Peter 1 v.'s 19&20; Rev.13 v.8). We also know that God chose us in Him at the same time (Eph.1 v.4). Jesus came as a man to save men, who were created in the image of His God and Father. Our salvation history

begins in Genesis ch.3 with the fall of the first created man, and finishes when Jesus declared it to be finished on the cross of Calvary (John 19 v.30).

C) All the fish of the sea and the birds of the air were created on day 5, together with livestock (which became domesticated), reptiles and wild animals on day 6, each “**according to their kinds**”. In Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species...”, he did not use the word “evolution”, but he was essentially putting across “the origin of species from earlier forms, not by special creation”. “The Descent of Man”, published a few years later, went further in postulating that mankind was included in this evolutionary process. He saw all forms of life as having evolved from more primitive types of a lower order, and saw no limit to which creatures could evolve from other creatures.

Genesis 1 stands in total contradiction of this view. God created fixed kinds. There can be great variation within a kind (i.e.- the various kinds of dog, or butterfly etc.), but there are definite boundaries. “Kinds” do not evolve into other “kinds”, which is an integral part of evolutionary thinking. The fossil record supports this, to the embarrassment of the Darwin fraternity. There are no fossils which have ever been shown to be in any sort of transitional state. They either reveal extinct creatures, or species as we know them to-day. John Blanchard says, in his excellent booklet, “Evolution, fact or fiction?": “Far from backing evolution, the fossil record helps to bury it. The earth’s Cambrian period is said to have begun 600 million years ago and to have lasted about 80 million years. The Cambrian rocks reveal a bewildering variety of fossils of highly developed life forms...which represent every group of organisms living to-day.” No transitional life-forms can be observed, nor any primitive life-forms which can remotely support evolutionary theories. The Father created fixed “kinds”, and they were given His blessing “**Be fruitful and increase in number**” (1 v.22), and this is what they did!

If Genesis 1 gives us an awe-inspiring glance at the vastness of the created order, then Genesis 2 gives us an inspirational close-up as to our own origins in the Garden. The contrast is striking. Again, three aspects occur to me as I read the passage. Firstly, the way that God “breathes” His life into living creatures of all forms, secondly, the brevity of man’s early innocence, and thirdly, the creation of woman as his lifelong helpmeet.

A) **the breath of life** – Man’s distinctiveness as God’s special creature does not come from the fact that He breathed His life into man (2 v.7). God also gave that same breath to the animals and birds (1 v.30), and created them in the same way (from “out of the ground” - 2 v.19). The Hebrew words *neshamah* or *ruwach* are used almost interchangeably to mean this life-giving inspiration from God to His creatures. They become living souls as a result of the Creator’s action. An animal or bird has a mind, a will and emotions, just as we have (i.e. - the essential components of the soul). What it does not have is a spiritual capacity. It is not

made in “the image” of God. It lacks creative intelligence, moral fibre, the faculty of conscience and general God-awareness. In ch.1 v.’s 29&30 we read that the man and the woman, as well as the animals, were both given to eat of the plants and fruit trees, they were vegetarian. A distinction therefore exists between such living creatures and plant life – the latter does not have the “breath of life” in the same way. Plant life is given for food, and there is no killing, for any reason whatever.

The point is that the life of God’s creatures is not to be taken wantonly. We see later that, under the law, the blood of animals/birds could be used in sacrifice, but only in the prescribed way. The penalty for sacrificing in a wrong way was to be cut off from the people of God (Leviticus 17 v.4). Such creatures could be eaten for food by this time (Gen.9 v.3), but their life-blood was not to be eaten. Their blood represented their life. That blood was to be shed in sacrifice, and was to have no other use (Lev.17 v.’s 11&12). This was God’s distinctive regulation to His chosen people, for the surrounding pagan nations ate blood as a matter of custom, both in diet and ritual. We therefore see at this early stage how important the life of a creature which has the “breath of life” in it is to God – these creatures will be, for His ancient people, the means by which they can be forgiven. A life must be offered in sacrifice for forgiveness to be possible – **“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”** (Hebrews 9 v.22).

B) The “age” of innocence – probably the shortest “age” there has ever been! I put myself in Adam’s position. “All I have to do is to obey one command. The sinful nature is unknown to me. I have a disposition which inclines towards God and an idyllic existence in a setting of original beauty. I am fully able to communicate with my Maker, so much so that He gives me a job remit and delegates that role to me with complete trust. The Boss trusts me! He even does the donkey work – He brings all the creatures to me that have the breath of life (like me), and tells me to name them. He’s going to accept whatever name I give them. You see, when God made me, He made me an intelligent man. I can speak fluently, I can do sophisticated tasks, and I can write ably (Adam must have written at least a part of the “account of his line” that we have in ch.5). My descendents will go on to be skilled musicians and workers in metal (4 v.’s 21&22). It doesn’t get better than this!”

C) Someone to share with. “Maybe something is lacking after all..... I’m a bit lonely down here. I know I have You (my Creator God), but I still feel the need for something, or someone else, a helpmeet. So He puts me into a deep sleep, does a bit of painless surgery, and when I wake up, He brings this wonderful companion to me. He even lets me know how He did it – He doesn’t keep anything from me that I need to know (cp. Gen.18 v.17). The woman is a part of me, and she will always be a part of me. We will work together, relax together, rely on each other, and will always trust each other, just as He trust us. We hide nothing from each

other, and nothing from our Creator. Now, I really have got it made. This is how I want to live - for ever and a day!

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1) “The chief end of man is to worship God, and to enjoy Him forever” (The Westminster Catechism). What pointers do Gen. ch.’s 1&2 give us to underscore the truth of this?

2) The goodness of God in His creative handiwork comes across strongly in Gen. ch.1. As Christian believers, we know that Jesus was engaged with the Father in this glorious process, rejoiced with Him at its completion, and continues in His exaltation to uphold all things (Prov.8 v.’s 30&31, John 1 v.3, Heb. 1 v.’s 2&3). It was said of Jesus in His humanity that He did all things well (Mark 7 v.37). Whilst on earth, He displayed His Father’s nature. Let’s pray that we display that nature to an unbelieving world, that we yield unreservedly to the Father’s desire to conform us to the likeness of His Son (Rom. 8 v.29).

3) The personal care and involvement of God in our lives comes across in Gen. ch. 2. He can teach and train us for specific tasks, He delegates responsibility to us to fulfil these tasks, He knows our needs (particularly of companionship), and takes definite steps to meet them. (Note the sanctity of the marriage covenant in 2 v.24). He delights in us, and longs to meet our every need (Prov.3 v.’s 5-8). Many other scriptures back this up. Think of a few, and personalise them!

Next week’s passage: Genesis 3 - 5

