

Sunday, December 27, 2009

Sermon – Scott Hobart “What Love Calls Us to Be and to Do”

My daughter had to do a project in school recording the different phases of the moon over a 5 week period. Spending time gazing into the sky at night can leave you with a feeling of being very small compared to our God the creator of everything we see. What is amazing about our God is that he is concerned about the seemingly huge gap between him and us. He is so concerned that he continually reaches out offering redemption to those who choose to follow him.

The word of God, tells us over and over how the God of the stars has reached out to redeem us, to bring us forgiveness and to bring us back into a relationship with God. This morning as we are in-between Christmas and the new year I want us to be reminded that our God is a God of new beginnings, and offers unconditional love and forgiveness.

Let's begin with Adam and Eve. With the creation of man, God changed his relationship with the created world. Arthur Glasser wrote, “Although constituted with all other creatures as completely dependent upon their Creator, humans received the breath of God and are capable of intelligent interaction with God, endowed with the freedom to obey or disobey him. Humans are thus portrayed as created specially to be in a unique relationship with their Creator.”¹ God allow us the privilege of choice. Choices are what we humans strive for. One of the most common complaints about life is that one feels locked in, or trapped, or buried in their obligations. God did not want us to feel obligated to Him, just open to his love.

The gentle manner in which God dealt with Adam and Eve gives us the first opportunity in the Bible to get a look at God's desire for redemption. God told Adam and Eve, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen. 2:16-17 NRSV). The instruction seems fairly simple, but still Adam and Eve tested God's mercy by partaking of the forbidden fruit. In the next chapter of Genesis we read, “But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” (Gen. 3:9). This short passage shows the patience of God. God undoubtedly knew what Adam and Eve did, yet God still came to the garden and gave Adam and Eve a chance to explain the situation they put themselves in. This is at the heart of redemption, God's willingness and desire to offer forgiveness to his creation. God took the initiative to call to Adam, not with his teeth clinched in a fiery anger, but with a gentle “where are you?”

Humans can not avoid all sin, making every interaction with God the opportunity for God to judge us, but God's judgment is not simply focused on punishment. Eric Wahlstrom wrote, “His coming and his presence with us provides the possibility of redemption for

¹ Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 35.

those who hear his call and obey his will. He comes not only to judge but to redeem.”² This is but the first act in a grand production that God set in motion in the Garden of Eden. God set a precedent of redemption in the Garden of Eden that carries through to Christ.

It does not take too much further reading in Genesis to find another example of humans taking advantage of their ability to choose between what is good and what is evil. The story of Noah and the flood is another event that showcases God’s desire for redemption. We read in the Bible, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart...But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord” (Gen. 6:5-6, 8). Redemption always follows judgment and in this case the judgment was harsh. All human life on Earth was ended except for Noah and his family. Irvin Busenitz writes about God’s judgment, “In it He demonstrated His unwillingness to allow the sinfulness of man to derail His plan set forth in Genesis 3:15, His unwillingness to allow the sinfulness of man to abrogate the pre-fall command to ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,’ a command reiterated after the flood to Noah.”³

The events surrounding Noah’s life are similar to Adam and Eve in that the purpose of the redemption of Noah was not for momentary forgiveness of sins. The purpose was to correct the relationship, or in this instance, restart a proper relationship with all humanity. Arthur Glasser wrote, “Although we are made aware in the narrative of the distance that separated Noah from God, we discern in this covenant the beginnings of a new sequence in God’s dealings with humankind. Ultimately they will eventuate in ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Rev. 21:1) in which a redeemed people will enjoy forever his presence, friendship, and service.”⁴

Perhaps one of the most recognizable redemptive acts of God is the story of how God used Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. The exodus from Egypt is joyfully sung about in Exodus 15, “In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode” (Ex. 15:13). When looking at the entire song of Moses in verses 1-18, “The emphasis is threefold: (1) Israel’s God is a powerful God; (2) he is one who treats his redeemed people as family; and (3) he is the One who firmly guides them to his ‘holy [cf. v. 11] habitation.”⁵ Similar to the events with Adam and Eve, the Jews in Egypt needed a corrective measure to right their relationship with God. The Jews had been led from a famine to a land where God allowed them to grow and prosper. The descendants of Jacob and Joseph could have become too comfortable in their new home, forgetting to foster their relationship with God, or perhaps the Israelites just forgot about the promise given to

² Eric Wahlstron, *God Who Redeems: Perspectives in Biblical Theology*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962.

³ Irvin A. Busenitz, “Introduction to the Biblical Covenants; The Noahic Covenant and the Priestly Covenant,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 10 (Fall 1999): 182.

⁴ Glasser, 49.

⁵ Richard D. Patterson, “The Song of Redemption,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (Fall 1995): 458.

Abraham that they will have their own land. Terence Fretheim writes, "When God delivers Israel from bondage to Pharaoh, the people of Israel are reclaimed for the human situation intended in God's creation."⁶ The belief that one can fully provide for oneself can lead to a distancing from God. Leading the Israelites out of Egypt put God literally right in front of God's people. The redemption of Israel corrected their relationship with God by making God a priority.

There are other stories of redemption in the Bible but ultimately redemption for us came in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

All of God's redemptive history can be defined by the cross and Jesus Christ's resurrection. We who are living as Christians today look back to the event of Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ is for us the event through which we have been redeemed and become the children of God."⁷ All of the covenants, judgements, and times of redemption displayed in the Bible lead up to the coming of Christ. All that God does is intended to bring humankind into fellowship with God. David Brondos wrote, "Christ's death is seen as fulfilling some condition necessary for redemption to occur: without the cross, it would have been impossible for human nature to be restored, for the forces of evil to be vanquished, or for the penalty required by divine justice or the divine law to be abrogated,"⁸

Redemption through the death and resurrection of Christ is very different from the other events spoken of in this work. With the death of Christ, the judgment fell on the innocent and the promise was given to the guilty. The promise that Christ left at his ascension was that the Holy Spirit would come to help and that eventually Christ would return. The faith in Jesus as Christ and Lord inevitably must be accompanied by a conviction that he will return."⁹

God's offer of redemption and the faith in the return of Christ and our eternity in Heaven is the basis of the love spoke about in 1 John 4. If we love God, if we accept His offer for forgiveness than we must pass this on to other people through words, and our acts of love toward them.

⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus," *Interpretation* 45 (October 1991): 358.

⁷ Wahlstrom, 52.

⁸ David Brondos, "The Cross and the Cure: Galatians 3:13 and Paul's Doctrine of Redemption," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* #81 March 2001, p. 5.

⁹ Wahlstrom, 35.