

The Plan and The Problems

Genesis 1-3

Sermon Summary

This message looks at God's plan for humanity and the ensuing problems with the plan. It's not that God's plan was flawed, but there was a variable in His plan, and that variable was us! He knew all about the variable when He implemented His plan. Our creating problems with His plan did not catch Him by surprise. After all, He is an all-knowing, all-powerful, sovereign God, but as the sovereign God, He made a choice to allow those variables in His plan. We will look at the elements of God's plan found in the Genesis narrative, and the problems caused by human refusal to follow God's plan! We end by looking at God's contingency plan and its fulfillment through Jesus in The New Testament!

Prayer

Intro

I'm so excited that we're going to read the Bible together as a Church this year! Today I'm going to preach a message that comes from the first three chapters of the Bible. This week you will be reading those chapters and several others in Genesis as well as a couple of chapters from the book of Job. Obviously I can't preach on all of those chapters, but each week we'll be preaching messages that will come from some portion of the material you will be reading in your five days of Bible readings. Many of our small groups will then study the Scriptures taught in the message. It's going to be a great time and our prayer is that through this we will see life transformation and spiritual awakening. Today we're going to begin several weeks of looking at how God's promises found in the Old Testament prevail all the way to the New Testament. We're going to look at God's plan for humanity and the ensuing problems with the plan. It's not that God's plan was flawed, but there was a variable in His plan, and that variable was us, and He knew all about the variable when He implemented His plan. Our creating problems with His plan did not catch Him by surprise. After all, He is an all-knowing, all-powerful, sovereign God, but as sovereign God, He made a choice to allow those variables in His plan. What in the world am I talking about? Let's look at our text and I think you will understand. Genesis 1:26-27...

In His Image

Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Gen 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Memory Verse)

What is this "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness"? This is the first time we see the concept of The Holy Trinity: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. So God

created man in his own image, male and female. What does this mean? Does this mean we look like God physically? No! It means, like God, we have been given a will, a personality, a choice. According to Genesis we were made on the same day as the higher animals, but we are different from them in the fact that we are not governed by instinct, but by the ability to think, to reason and to make choices. Being created in the very image of God allows us the privilege of fellowship with God unlike any other of the creatures God created. I don't have time to delve deeply into the issue of creation versus evolution this morning, but I want to say this: The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how God created the world and the life that resides on earth. I don't believe evolution is the way God did it because the fossil data and other supporting evidence is simply not there. Evolution is still a theory and is based on extrapolations Charles Darwin and subsequent scientific philosophers have surmised. I say scientific philosophers because there is a lot of conjecture, speculation, theorizing, and hypothesizing going on in the scientific community when it comes to how life as we know it came to be. The fact that species adapt and change is indisputable, but Darwinian Evolution is not indisputable. Let me just say this, if they could ever prove that evolution, as it is being taught today, is a fact, then I could prove to you that there is a God! Why? Because there is no way the millions and billions of minute changes and upgrades that would have had to have happened over millions of years wouldn't stand a chance of working without the guidance of a Divine intelligence making sure every step happened with absolute precision. So the bottom line for me is this: Creation was a supernatural act of God rather than a natural happenstance that just accidentally worked! In fact, scientific study would be impossible if everything were based on happenstance. Dr. Elton Trueblood, put it this way...

"It is important to realize that this entire scientific enterprise would be impossible if the actions of the various constituents of the universe which we study were arbitrary. Only upon the supposition that the natural world is fundamentally orderly is science possible at all."

In other words, while nature is ever changing, there are certain laws of nature that do not change and have been in place since the beginning.

Now that I've opened that can of worms, let me just say this. Your salvation does not depend upon your scientific views on how God created the earth! Salvation depends upon your acceptance of what Jesus did on the Old Rugged Cross, and we're going to discover some amazing things about that in just a minute. Remember I said that mankind was created on the same day as the other higher animals? What sets us apart and different? What caused us to be made in the image of God?

The Breath of Life

Gen 2:7 the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

H.H. Rowley, wrote this in his work, "Rediscovery of the Old Testament"...

“In his spiritual attainment man is quite other than God; but in that he is a spiritual being, capable of fellowship with God, and capable of reflecting something of the character of God, he has a measure of affinity with God. And this measure of affinity is God’s gift to man in the act of his creation, and not something that man has achieved for himself.”

In other words, we are not little gods, but we are spiritual beings whom God created in order to have fellowship with, and to bless, and to love, and to cherish! But by creating us in His image, He gave us a soul, a spirit, a will, and a choice. I believe this was one of the most difficult choices God ever made, for He knew if He made us in His image, thereby giving us a mind of our own, we might very well choose poorly. If we chose poorly, it would bring consequences for us and for God! You will see what I’m talking about as we continue...

The Garden

Gen 2:8 Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

So God creates this paradise for Adam and Eve. It was His original plan for humanity to live in happiness and joy. This doesn’t mean before the fall of man that Adam just sat around and did nothing all day. He was tasked with being in charge of creation. But it was a joyous occupation. It didn’t become a pain and toilsome labor until later. As we read on we’ll discover more of the details concerning God’s plan.

The Trees

Gen 2:9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God not only put Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden, but it was a garden complete with everything they needed for life! It had trees for food, a tree of life, and one tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. More on this tree in just a minute, but I want to say I believe the very act of creation was an act of giving by God! He had so much love to give, and so many blessings to bestow, and no one to share these things with. So God created us so He could love us and bless us! God’s motivation for creation was pure from the very beginning! I love what the twenty-four elders had to say in the Book of Revelation...

Rev 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

God thought of everything in His plan for creation. He knew there would need to be a source of water so He Created...

The River

Gen 2:10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.

I love the way the Psalmist talked about the provision of God...

Psa 65:9 You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. So God had a plan! He created humankind in His image and breathed into them the breath of life. He placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, a paradise with all the provisions they would ever need to live. Trees bearing fruit, and rivers to provide water for life. But once again, the plan to create humans in His image carried with it a risk because of...

The Choice

Gen 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Gen 2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;

Gen 2:17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Notice, God didn't say, "If you eat of the tree I'll get mad and kill you!" He said "you will surely die." God was not being mean or bad to Adam and Eve, He was being honest and like any good parent, He was letting them know of the dangers that were inherent in certain behaviors. Years ago I was canoeing down the Bogue Chito River with a musician friend of mine. We pulled out on a sandbar to eat our lunch. He asked me why God had put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden. He said it seemed like God was tempting Adam and Eve to do bad. I told him the tree represented the choice Adam and Eve had in their relationship with God. I asked my friend if he would be okay if his girlfriend turned out to be a robot programmed to tell him everything he wanted to hear, but she had no real heart or mind to make a choice. He said that would be terrible! I told him, God's not weird and he wouldn't want people who were pre-programmed to say the right things and sing the right songs to Him. That wouldn't be loving God or worshiping God, it would just be weird. I asked him how his girlfriend would feel if he kidnapped her and took her to some other country and she was forced to marry him. He said I would never do that, but that would be terrible. I said, God won't force His love on us either. He's not that kind of God.

Sometimes we want God to use His power and authority and instantly, immediately make everything right. Just don't give people a choice. Make them do the right thing! But in order to do this, God would have to crush the human spirit, the human will. He would have to destroy human freedom. He would have to give up the whole reason He created humankind. He would have to give up the possibility of a beautiful, meaningful relationship with the creatures He created in His own image, the ones He caused to

become living spirits by breathing into their nostrils the breath of life. He would have to take away their uniqueness and cause them to become mere animals of instinct. That's simply not something God was willing to do! Jesus alluded to this when He described His rejection by those at Jerusalem...

Luke 13:34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

Today, that scene is repeated time and time again. Jesus will not force anyone to submit to His will, His love, His ways. Some people consistently resist allowing Jesus to be a part of their life, and you know what, if that's the way you want it, He will not disrespect your space, but it saddens His heart. He knows the struggles you're facing and wants to help, but it's not His choice, it's yours.

Sometimes the problem is who we are listening to...

The Lie

Gen 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

Gen 3:2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, Gen 3:3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

Gen 3:4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.

Did you know Satan is still up to his old tricks? He's still trying to convince people that God has it in for them, that He has lied to them, and doesn't really have their best interest at heart! You've heard of New Age Philosophies? New Age Philosophies are nothing more than old lies in a new age! Satan tells Eve that God had lied to her and the consequences for disregarding God's warning would not really result in her death! "You will not surely die!" Satan then steps up his attack with...

The Temptation

Gen 3:5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Satan appeals to Eve's human pride! Pride seems to be our Achilles heel. How many lives have been destroyed by pride? How many marriages have been torn apart by pride? How many people have refused God's love and help because of pride? The root of almost every form of temptation somehow comes down to pride! We think we know better than God! We think sin will make us truly happy and in our pride we want what we want more than we want what is right, what is good for others, or what is God's will! And here's the root problem with pride...

The Trust Issue

Gen 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it...

Eve could choose to trust God and His heart and love for her, or she could decide not to trust Him and break the relationship. You see all good relationships are based on trust. You can love someone, but if you can't trust them, the relationship will not be so great! Satan attacked the relationship God had with Adam and Eve by planting seeds of distrust! Has Satan ever done that to you with your relationship with God? It's like Satan whispers in your ear, when you're having a bad day..."What's God doing, are you going to keep trusting a God who would allow difficulty and tragedy to be a part of your life? If God really cared about you He wouldn't let you go through something like this! He doesn't really love you, He just doesn't want you to have fun and enjoy life, come on I'll show you a good time! Trust me, I would never lead you wrong!" Satan convinced Eve and she ate the fruit, and boy have we loved to give women a hard time about this, but the next part of verse 6 is very telling as it speaks of...

The Lack of Leadership

Gen 3:6 ...She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Wait a minute! Adam what were you thinking? Have you ever heard about this thing called "Kingdom Man?" Where's your leadership of the family? It says Adam was with her! Why didn't he intervene and speak up? Eve might have reconsidered, and walked away, but Adam was silent. Not only was he silent when she offered him some, he ate it! Now they both realized they had done wrong and there was...

The Attempted Cover Up

Gen 3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Gen 3:8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Ever try covering up your sin only for it to be discovered at some point? Ever tried hiding from God? Some people think if they only stay home from church, God won't really know what they're up to! But here's the deal, you can't cover up sin or hide from God! He knows what you've done and He knows where you live. So at some point there's going to be...

The Confrontation

Gen 3:9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

Gen 3:10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Gen 3:11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

What does that confrontation look like now? It's called the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and let me say this: The Holy Spirit doesn't put conviction on you to make you feel bad, He puts conviction on you to try and pull you away from sin. Why? Because He knows what sin can do! He knows how sin destroys and robs you of your peace and separates you from fellowshiping with God! But many times we are more concerned with...

The Blame Game

Gen 3:12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Gen 3:13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So many times I've wondered why when we do something wrong we feel this need to justify what we've done or we want to blame somebody else? Why can't we just man up, or for the ladies, just step up and admit you've messed up and need some grace and mercy. Grace is when we get what we don't deserve, like forgiveness, and mercy is when we don't get what we deserve, like eternal separation from God and instead get eternal life in glory! We can be forgiven for our sin, but sin has consequences and that's...

The Immediate Cost

Gen 3:16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

Gen 3:17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

Gen 3:18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

Gen 3:19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

So sin has temporal and eternal consequences! But the astounding truth is that God's love was so deep and powerful, and determined, He had a contingency worked into His plan for the problems that would arise from humanity's bad choices...

The Ultimate Cost

Gen 3:21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

Gen 3:22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

Gen 3:23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

Gen 3:24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

There are two ultimate costs in this passage. Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden. This was not because God was mad at them, but it was to keep them from eating from the tree of eternal life in their sinful state and living forever in their sin. So this ultimate cost was born by Adam and Eve and subsequently humanity. But the other ultimate cost was born by God! God did something interesting and powerful that would point to the price He would one day have to pay! Now you might remember that Adam had named the animals as they were brought before him. Evidently there had been a special harmony with the animals before the fall of man. When God makes garments of skin for Adam and Eve, they were probably shocked and appalled that something had to lose its life to cover their shame, their mistake, their sinful pride and lack of trust in God's friendship. Remember I told you one of the most difficult decisions God ever had to make was whether or not to create us in His image! I believe the second hardest decision God ever had to make was to allow His One and Only Begotten Son to die in order to give humanity another chance to make the right choice. So here's the amazing parts of God's contingency plan:

There would be other Gardens...

The garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed "Not my will but Yours be done" shortly before His arrest and the Garden of the Tomb where Jesus was temporarily buried.

John 19:41 At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.

There would be another Tree...

This time the tree would be cut down and would be shaped into a cross! This Cross would represent two trees from the Garden of Eden: The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life! Jesus was the perfect Lamb of God and therefore represented Good, but on the Cross this happened...

2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And since Jesus defeated death and the grave on the cross it now represents the Tree of Life! Paul said this...

2 Tim 1:8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,
2 Tim 1:9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,
2 Tim 1:10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

There would be another chance to Choose to Trust God!

The way Adam and Eve could have chosen to place their trust in God was to stay away from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and not consume the fruit which hung from it! The way we now make the choice to trust God is to come to the Old Rugged Cross and be covered in the precious blood of Jesus which can wash away our sinful stains.

God has the power to coerce, to dazzle, to force obedience, to destroy, but He has chosen not to use His power in those ways! He has chosen instead to limit His power and take on Human flesh. He chose to live among us as one of us. He chose to take on an earth suit that was fragile and could be hurt, bruised, broken. One that could bleed. He chose to give rather than take, to seek love rather than demand love. He would rather die on the Cross than force someone to accept His love. Peter put it this way...

1 Pet 1:18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,

1 Pet 1:19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1 Pet 1:20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

1 Pet 1:21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Pray!