

The Importance Of Beginning In The Beginning [Deeper Sheet 8.16.09]

Read Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 21 + 22

Where and how you begin the story of the Scriptures and where and how you end the story of the Scriptures shapes and determines what the story even is. Genesis 1 begins with poetry describing the seven days of creation. Genesis 2 retells the creation story as a narrative. But central to both creation accounts is the idea that God's creation is on the move. It produces. It sprouts. It grows. So God appointed men and women to rule over creation and subdue it. In other words, there is responsibility involved with this creation. It has a proper order and must be maintained, must be stewarded. There is also an emphasis on blessing. God creates then blesses. Whatever we love in life can be found in Genesis 1 and 2. Interestingly, the story of the Scriptures ends in much the same way as it begins. God's people reign, literally participate, with God forever in ordering, stewarding, and guiding creation.

The story starts here. The story ends here. In fact, take sin out of the Bible and you're left with a pamphlet four chapters long. Even without sin in the Bible, there is a progression and movement from the garden of Genesis to the city of Revelation. The story starts here. The story ends here, with God in the midst of a blessed creation, participating with people to ensure that creation is ordered just as God intended it to be. The action is here, not in some other realm.

Still, the Bible isn't a pamphlet, and there is a not-so-small section [Genesis 3-Revelations 20] cataloging all the ways in which sin has left God's creation in disorder. Sin is the disruption of *Shalom*, the wholeness and peace of what God intended. Sin is all the ways in which men and women have rebelled against God's good intentions and participated in the old way, the way of death. Sin is missing the mark, and the consequences of sin are dire. For example, there are hundreds of people who don't have enough food to eat on a daily basis. The world produces enough food for everyone, but some people have exponentially more than others. It's not a production problem. It's a distribution problem. It's what happens when we fail to order God's creation properly. Sin always leads to death. Confession, then, is the admission of our participation in the old order. Repentance is to turn or return to how God intended things to be, because there is a story before the brokenness.

Yet even in the midst of the mess, God can be found insisting that the point of the story isn't simply the removal of sin. In Matthew 19, Jesus refers to the renewal of all things. Peter uses a similar phrase in Acts 3: "the restoration of all things". Even Paul in his letter to the Colossians refers to the reconciliation of all things. The Scriptures are patterned after the blessed beginning. When we begin reading the Bible in Genesis 3 rather than Genesis 1 and 2, we actually change the meaning. The difference looks something like this. When you begin reading in:

Genesis 3: The story is the removal of sin.

Genesis 1: The story includes the removal of sin; it's a piece of the much larger story of the restoration of all things.

Genesis 3: Emphasizes what people aren't: how we fall short.

Genesis 1: Emphasizes what people are: who we've been created to be.

Genesis 3: The focus is disembodied evacuation: how to get somewhere else. The center of God's redemptive activity is in some other realm.

Genesis 1: The focus is co-creative participation: God is looking for partners to renew, restore, and reconcile this world.

But the story doesn't start with Genesis 3. And it doesn't end with Genesis 3. We're meant to live in anticipation of the coming day when heaven and earth are one again. In a sense, we're meant to participate in the process of heaven invading earth. This has massive implications. Business becomes the process of helping to arrange creation so that people's needs are appropriately met. Art becomes the beautiful and necessary process of making new things out of what we've been given. Justice is the work of ensuring that all of God's creation is properly ordered. A Christian, then, is never surprised when grace, beauty, meaning, order, compassion, truth, and love show up in all sorts of unexpected people and places because it always has been God's world, it is God's world, and it always will be God's world.

What are some of things you love most about life? Where do you see those things in Genesis 1 + 2?

We tend to be well versed in the unholy liturgy of what we aren't, how we fall short. But in what ways has God created you to uniquely reflect his glory? If you're with a group of people, take twenty minutes to point out to one another how you each uniquely reflect the glory of what God intended.

A Genesis 3 reading of the Scriptures is rooted in how bad things are. A Genesis 1 + 2 reading of the Scriptures is rooted in how good things were meant to be and what we've been called by God to do in order to bring about the renewal of all things. What things do you keep noticing about the world that are troubling to you?

A Genesis 3 reading of the Scriptures leads to statements about what we lack, what we can't do about the brokenness of our world. A Genesis 1 + 2 reading of the Scriptures leads to statements about what we *can* do. Rather than focusing simply on how bad things are, what can you do, what are you capable of doing to help renew, restore, and reconcile the things about our world that trouble you?