

“The True History of the World”

Genesis 4:1

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Epiphany Season

Pr. Josh Anderson

In the fall of 2017 and first few months of 2018, we spent a sermon series considering Genesis 1-3, the first three books of the Scriptures.

Now, five years later, we return to Genesis, picking up where we left off in chapter 4. My goal is to spend much of our winter and spring together in these early chapters of the Bible first book, planning to cover, in some detail, Genesis 4-12.

Our sermon text this morning is a very short one. It's found in Genesis 4:1. Listen now carefully to God's holy and inerrant word.

“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’”

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you. Prayer...

Every time I preach, I conclude my reading of the Scripture with this simple phrase, a phrase I learned from my Reformed University Fellowship pastor when I was a college student. It's a phrase that really impacted me at the time, and I hope it's helpful for you to hear it as well.

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you.

It's an important phrase, because as modern people we have a natural disposition to be skeptical about anyone who claims to be telling us the truth.

It doesn't matter where we get our news from, we know there's a slant, a bias, a subtle or not so subtle distortion of truth to fit someone's agenda.

It doesn't matter if it's a textbook or memoir or a prize award winning narrative of history — we're always asking ourselves the question — what's the author up to? How is he or she coloring the facts? What liberties are they taking with the truth in order to convince me of their message?

And this kind of skepticism is understandable. One of the most fundamental things that is true about human beings is that human beings lie.

We lie maliciously - yes, for power and gain and protection, but even more frighteningly, we also lie instinctively without even knowing we're doing it.

As the Scriptures themselves teach us: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

It's kind of exhausting, really, all this work we do all the time to separate truth from error or deception, the way we must constantly evaluate even our own hearts for lies.

But in contrast to all that, the Scriptures speak to us in a different kind of way.

When you hear those words: "Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in heaven loves you," it should feel like relief.

It should feel like permission to turn that part of your brain off that is always trying to discern everyone's potential agenda.

Because here, when we read from God's word, when we read from the Scriptures, we can be confident, we can be assured, that what God says is absolutely true.

And I want to contend this morning that this reality of the truth of God's word applies to the book of Genesis just as much as it does to every other part of God's word, and in particular, that these early chapters of Genesis are absolutely true.

Genesis 1-11 (that is, the portion of the Scripture that record the events from creation to the call of Abraham) are often referred to as "primeval history" by Bible scholars, and it's not just so called "liberal" or "progressive" theologians who question their historicity.

Increasingly, even evangelical scholars wonder if it really matters whether the events of Genesis 1-11 took place — what does it matter if this is real history, the argument goes, as long as we acknowledge that the principles behind the stories contain divine truth, especially as they show us God's character, the reality of sin, and God's plan for salvation?

I know this debate may seem esoteric, but I promise you, it matters. And at the heart of the argument is this question — what kind of book is the Bible, actually?

Are the Scriptures just given to us so that we might know that we might know how to be saved? Are they just given to us so that might know what we need to believe so that our souls will go to heaven when we die? You might call this a narrow understanding of what the Scriptures intend to teach.

Or, on the other hand, are the Scriptures given to us so that we know not only how to be saved, but also how to live wisely in every area of our lives? Are the Scriptures about just salvation, or are they about everything — including salvation?

Psalm 119, perhaps the most extended meditation on Scripture in all of the Bible, teaches us here, I think.

It's clear from Psalm 119 that the psalmist understands that the Scriptures are not simply given him as a way that he might know how his sins could be forgiven.

No, what the Psalmist emphasizes in this longest and arguably the greatest psalm in the psalter is the comprehensive value and beauty of the Scriptures.

The Scriptures give him life, he says. They teach him the way of purity and holiness. The Scriptures give him knowledge. They are more to be valued than gold or silver.

The Scriptures are a lamp to his feet and a light to his path. They are sweeter than honey on his lips.

The Scriptures, according to Psalmist, are his constant meditation, for they give him more understanding than all human teachers.

They make him wise, he says, more wise than even the aged. And again and again, the Psalmist declares that the Scriptures are truth.

It is clear from Psalm 119 that the psalmist believes that the Scriptures speak to the whole of his life, not just the things that are important for him to know for salvation.

And, I would argue that this is exactly what the Scriptures are for.

They are given to us to teach us everything we might need to know about the world.

The 20th century theologian Cornelius Van Til puts it this way:

“The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything. We do not mean that it speaks of football games, of atoms, etc., directly, but we do mean that it speaks of everything either directly or by implication. It tells us not only of the Christ and his work, but it also tells us who God is and where the universe about us has come from. It tells us about theism as well as about Christianity. It gives us a philosophy of history as well as history. Moreover, the information on these subjects is woven into an inextricable whole. It is only if you reject the Bible as the word of God that you can separate the so-called religious and moral instruction of the Bible from what it says, e.g., about the physical universe.”

The Bible is about everything, beloved. It's not just where we learn from God about salvation.

It's also where we learn from God about marriage and parenting and work and economics and law and journalism and sex and politics and animals and mountains and art and farming and music and everything other kind of human endeavor.

And so this, for me, is why it matters whether Genesis 1-11 give us a true history. Because God doesn't only want us to know how to go to heaven when we die.

God also does not wish us to remain ignorant about the earliest days of the human race. God wants us to know the true history of the world.

God wants us to know about the truth of who we are, and what the world is like, and what it means to live wisely in relationship to our creator and his creation.

To be clear, God giving us the true history of the world means, in my view, that Adam and Eve were real historical persons, from whom all human beings who live today are descended.

And God giving us the true history of the world really does mean that Cain founded a city called Enoch, which means that human beings possessed technology and culture and language far more quickly than is commonly believed in our age.

In addition, God giving us the true history of the world also means that the genealogies in Genesis 5, 10 and 11 give us a faithful and detailed chronology of all the years that passed between Adam and Abraham — giving us the ability to define more or less precisely how old the human race really is.

God gave us these genealogies, with a very specific accounting of the years between one generation and the next, because time matters to God, and he wants time to matter to us, and he wants to understand who we are and how long we've been here.

And God giving us the true history of the world also means that we know God judged all of humanity in a global flood, saving only Noah and his family from destruction.

And to be clear, we can have confidence in these things not only because the Bible is true, but also because the Bible is given to us so that we might have wisdom, so that we might not be left in ignorance, but so that we might have knowledge, not only regarding our salvation, but also that we might have the true history of the world.

And if we take the Scriptures seriously in this way, we'll find, I think, that these earliest chapters of the Bible are almost inexhaustibly rich, that they give us so much insight into who we are as human beings, and what this world that God has made is like — in fact, they are given to us that we might be wise.

Because it is here, in these earliest chapters of the Scriptures, that God reveals the fundamental truths about human nature and human suffering and human culture and God's redemption — truths that are then developed at length throughout all the rest of the Bible.

And so we're going to take our time with Genesis 4-12 this year. We're not going to speed through these chapters, we're going to try and uncover the details of these verses and see what they have to tell us about everything.

And that's why this morning we're just going to consider one verse, because this one verse contains so much about some of the fundamental aspects of what it means to be human — sexuality and procreation and childbirth.

In our world today, there is so much confusion about sexuality. What is sex for? Is it just about pleasure? It is how we express our identity? Is it just about power?

Well, the Bible doesn't want us to be ignorant about sex. The Scriptures are about everything, and that means that are given to us for wisdom in all things, including our sexuality.

And that's why the first words of the Scripture which describe life outside of Eden, after the fall, in the world in which we all live, read in this way:
"Now Adam knew Eve his wife."

That phrase, *"Now Adam knew Eve his wife,"* is full of meaning, full of wisdom.

On the one hand, that phrase speaks to us of God's kindness.

Remember, the final verses of Genesis 3 describe God driving Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden because of their sin and rebellion, and placing a flaming sword at the entrance so that they could not return.

What would life be like outside of the garden? Cold and hopeless and dark? Without joy or goodness? No, God's grace is not only about salvation and escaping to heaven.

God's grace is also about being kind to us in the midst of our life in this world that is tainted by our sin, and we know this the Scriptures teach us that *Adam knew Eve his wife*.

That phrase hearkens back to Genesis 2, where we read that after Eve was presented to Adam following her fashioning from his rib, "*The man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed.*"

Now, don't misunderstand me. The curses in Genesis 3 are real. None of us, even in the best of marriages, can be naked and unashamed with another in the way that Adam and Eve had the opportunity to experience before sin entered the world.

And yet, still, in the midst of their sinfulness, in God's kindness, *Adam knew Eve his wife*.

Real intimacy with one another is still available to us in this world. Real knowledge. Despite our sin, despite our fear, God gives us his grace.

This phrase, *Adam knew Eve his wife*, also teaches us something fundamental about human sexuality. Interestingly, the Scriptures use "to know" as verb for sexual intercourse only in the context of marriage.

Other kinds of sexual relationships are possible, of course. The Bible is aware of this. But it describes sexual intimacy as a man *knowing* a woman only in the context of marriage.

For example, later in Genesis, when Abraham takes Hagar, a woman who was not his wife, into his bed, the Bible says only that “Abraham went in to Hagar.” It does not say, “And Abraham knew Hagar.”

And that is because the Scriptures reserve this kind of language only for the exclusive marriage covenant between a man and a woman.

Sex, as it turns out, if we listen to the Scriptures, which teach us about everything, is not just about pleasure, or power, identity, or consent, or even, as it turns out, about procreation.

Sex is given to us for knowledge, for intimacy, for recognition. And this kind of sexual knowledge is available only to those have been joined together in marriage.

In other words, the reason we know that God intends sex only to be experienced between one man and one woman in the context of marriage is not only because Leviticus goes to great lengths to prohibit every other kind of sexual relationship.

We also know this is true because the Bible only uses this verb, “to know” as a description of sexual intimacy in the context of marriage.

But this first verse in Genesis 4 does not only give us wisdom about sexuality. It is us given to us so that we might have wisdom about procreation and childbirth.

The whole verse reads: “*Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’*”

The first thing the second half of this verse teaches us is again about God's kindness.

God might, in his sovereignty, have extinguished humanity after the sin of Adam and Eve. But here, outside the garden, we discover that God is kind. And his kindness is revealed in this way — he grants unto humanity the capacity to conceive and bear new life.

But how does this happen? Is it merely a biological process? No, human life, in this case, and in every case, is due to the direct intervention of the Lord.

Eve is our teacher here, for she names her son Cain, saying, *"I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."*

Indeed, Eve is, as Adam called her in Genesis 3, the "mother of all living," and here she shows us how all human life will come into being.

We will only receive children, as she says, "With the help of the LORD." In our own strength, we cannot do it. We cannot produce human life on our own. It is only with the help of the God who made heaven and earth that conception and pregnancy and childbirth take place.

Beloved, I want to be gentle here, because I know there are so many stories in this sanctuary that speak to the truth of these things.

But, from my own personal story and my years of pastoral counseling, I will say that I don't think that there is any experience available to human beings that teaches us more about our helplessness before God than the experience of seeking to conceive and bear children into this world.

If you and your spouse have been able to have children easily and without any real trouble, then that is wonderful.

But of course, your experience has taken place only because of God's extravagant kindness, and it is very much the exception to the rule.

So many of our stories, my own included, include painful difficulties with infertility or miscarriage or childbirth. We cannot protect ourselves from this kind of vulnerability or danger.

And that is because God has designed the world in such a way that conception and pregnancy and childbirth would only take place with his help, his provision, his intervention.

Why this is the case, I don't fully know.

But I know it from my own experience, and I know it because the Scriptures, which teach me about everything, teach me that is only with the help of the LORD that we will bring children into this world.

And I suspect at least part of the reason God has designed the world in this way has to do with teaching us, in this most intimate of experiences, to trust and depend on him for all things, including and especially, the gift of children.

And so that we might learn that God, and God alone, holds the power of life — that we might wonder at his sovereignty and thank him for his mercy.

"Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.'"

Beloved, this short verse is so full of mystery and meaning and wisdom and God's kindness.

We have only begun to scratch the surface in our brief time together this morning.

But what I want you to see, above all things, is that all the Scriptures are like this. Every verse, every chapter of God's word is full of treasure and wisdom and truth and grace.

And, as such, the Scriptures are more valuable to us than any amount of earthly riches. The Scriptures are sweeter than honey on our lips.

Because in these pages, in these divinely inspired words, we have not only been given all we need to know for salvation.

We have also been given, by God's grace, the true history of the world.

Which is, in the end, the true story of God's kindness to the world he loves.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.