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Life Worth Giving      The God Who Calls      Romans 3:23; Genesis 3:1-14

Last week we began the pursuit of a Life Worth Giving by considering what it means to be “called by God.” It was Mark Twain who said, “The two most important days of your life are the day you are born and the day you discover why.” But before we ever discover the “why” we need to discover the “Who.” There are two kinds of stories that shape the persons we become – our own personal story (I shared a little of mine last week) and God’s bigger story; the story we live and the Story we live into.

The Bible is God’s story. Our goal today is to gain a better understand what God had in mind when He created us. Eugene Peterson points out that God “does not present us with a moral code and say, ‘Live up to this,’ nor does (He) set up a system of doctrine and say, ‘Think like this and you will live well.’ Instead, the way of Christian formation is to tell a story and in the telling invite the hearer, ‘Live into this – this is what it looks like to be human in this God-made and God-ruled world; this is what is involved in becoming and maturing as a human being.’” (Peterson, *Eat This Book*, quoted by Jones in *Dwell*, pp. 31-32)

You will never make sense of the story you live without understanding the story you live into, God’s bigger story, the story of God’s grand purpose for His creation. Your calling emerges out of a growing understanding of the NATURE and PURPOSE of God. **You will never know the call of God until you know the God who calls.** So this morning I want consider how the Bible answers three of life’s ultimate questions.

“I once heard this story about a priest, who was confronted by a soldier while he was walking down a road in pre-revolutionary Russia. The soldier, aiming his rifle at the priest, commanded, “Who are you? Where are you going? Why are you going there?” Unfazed, the priest calmly replied, ‘How much to they pay you?’ Somewhat surprised, the soldier responded, ‘Twenty-five kopecks a month.’ The priest paused, and in a deeply thoughtful manner said, ‘I have a proposal for you. I’ll pay you fifty kopecks each month if you stop me here every day and challenge me to respond to those same three questions.’” This morning we are going to explore how the Bible answers those three questions because how you answer those three questions becomes the seed plot from which your calling grows.

**Who are you? The Creation Question.** To get a grasp on the purpose of God we have to go back to “the beginning.” The very first truth presented in the Bible is that God created the heavens and the earth and made them just right. The last verse of Gen. 1 says, “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” In other words, it was “just right.” Simple observation tells us this is so.

**The Earth is just the right size** - a quarter size bigger and we would weigh almost twice as much as we do now and would be unable to walk. Just a quarter size smaller and the air pressure would overpower our lungs and we would be unable to inhale. **The earth is slanted just right.** The earth’s axis is tilted, 23.5 degrees. This keeps our temperatures and seasons regulated. Without this slant, the earth would have monstrous ice caps at the poles and molten lava in between. **The earth spins and spirals at just the right speed.** The earth orbits the sun at about 67,000 miles per hour. If it revolved slower than that we would be drawn in by the sun’s gravitational pull and burn up. If it revolved faster we would break free from the sun’s gravity, be flung into space, and freeze.

We begin to understand something about our Creator by studying His creation. That’s why Ps. 19 says, “The heavens are telling the glory of God.” The heavens reveal some things about God but they don’t tell the whole story. So God goes on and creates various living things. Birds rule the sky so God gives them wings and feathers that are just right for flying. Fish rule the sea so God gives them gills and fins that are just right for living in the sea. Everything God created was equipped just right to fulfill His purpose. But the birds and fish don’t tell the whole story. So God’s crowning achievement is the creation of humans who will glorify Him. The word “glory” means the visible manifestation of the invisible God.

**God created us in His image and likeness...1:26.** When God made humans HE WAS JUST SHOWING OFF! It’s true. God was revealing His glory. He was revealing His nature. God thinks, speaks, loves and works. Since God is invisible we learn what He is like through what He has made. God’s glory is His highest goal. So when someone says they want to glorify God they are saying, “I want to accurately display the nature of God.”

**God created us to enjoy a relationship with Him...2:7.** God did something with the first human being that He did not do with the animals. He breathed **the breath of life** into man transformed him from merely a physical being into a spiritual being, with a capacity for communing with God. So often our calling is discussed in the context of what we DO for God. It is important to understand that God is more interested in our being with Him than our doing for Him. Jesus made it clear that our relationship with Him has priority over what we do for Him.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you.’” Mt. 7:21-23

**Where are you going? The Re-creation Question.** From the beginning God’s vision was that the whole earth would be a church, a temple where God’s people would have unrestrained access to Him. OT scholar Gordon Wenham writes, “The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and man should worship Him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary.” (*Dwell*, p. 38).

God’s assignment or calling for the first humans was to expand the boundaries of this garden-temple until it filled the whole earth with His glory. We’ll see next week that because of something called “sin” we all fall short of the glory of God but some day God’s plan and purpose will be fulfilled – the whole earth will be full of His glory. That gives us a clue as to why we are here.

Most of us have been taught that our calling is to “get people to Heaven.” The truth is that our calling is to get Heaven down to earth. In fact, the final scene of the Bible depicts a new restored Earth as the place where God and His people dwell together. One day, when creation is remade and renewed, God will make His dwelling place among His people...“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for

her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’ And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Rev. 21:1-5

For now, God’s dwelling place is in Heaven and ours here on earth but the Bible makes it clear that these two places are not separated by some unbridgeable chasm. Heaven and earth interact in a way in which God’s presence enters our place. This is the significance of the incarnation. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus is called Immanuel, God with us. In Jesus, Heaven came down. That’s why He said, “The kingdom of Heaven is here.” The future kingdom has broken into the present.

**Why are you here? The Righteousness Question.** The calling of every child of God is to pursue and promote God’s kingdom of righteousness and peace. The word “righteousness” has gotten a bad wrap in our culture. A righteous person is usually thought of as being morally upright. But the word conveys a sense of “set-rightness” or justice. When Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” He wasn’t talking about trying to be morally perfect. He was saying that those who live under the reign of God will work to set things right. Proverbs 11:10 says, “When the righteous prosper the city rejoices.” Why? Because wrongs are made right. Low-income families receive food, school kids learn to read, refugees are befriended and assisted so they can get an education and a job and enjoy a life that is productive and free from the persecution they once lived under.

We are called to be peace-makers who promote God’s shalom. The prophets spoke of a day when all that is wrong with the world will be made right. The broken will be made whole and the twisted will be made straight. The word they used to characterize a world that is set right is the word “shalom.” We translate “shalom” as peace but it is so much more than the absence of hostility. It requires multiple English words to get at it – wellbeing, wholeness, harmony, flourishing, delight. “Shalom” describes the way things are supposed to be. It is the vision of God for this world. It is God’s personal presence and just rule realized. God will see to it that there will be shalom one day. “God wants shalom and will pay any price to get it back. Human sin is stubborn, but not as stubborn as the grace of God and not half

so persistent, not half so ready to suffer to win its way.” (Platinga, quoted in Jones, p. 96)

You will never know the call of God until you know the God who calls. He created you and “you are fearfully and wonderfully made.” He breathed life into us so that we would have a relationship with Him and rule with Him on the earth as His image bearers. That is why we pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.”

Do you know Him? Are you experiencing the life He intended for you? “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that we would not perish but have everlasting life.” Jn. 3:16. God loves you so much that “He made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

God offers you the gift of life. Receive it and then return the favor. Give Him your life, your broken, imperfect life. God wants you to get where God wants you to go more than you want to get where God wants you to go. But He won’t force His will upon you. You may think you don’t have anything to give but that’s now how He sees it. He doesn’t need you to give Him anything but, like any Father, He takes great delight in the gift.

I want to show you one of my most prized possessions. It is a gift my daughter gave me many years ago. She thought it was a statue of a preacher so she bought it and gave it to me. I have proudly displayed it ever since knowing that some people probably wonder why I have a black Jazz singer on my bookshelf! This represents my feeble attempts to reflect the glory of God knowing that sometimes I’m not even close. But a father treasures not so much the gift but the intent of the giver. When my daughter gave me this gift she was saying, “This statue represents my dad. I want to show him that I value him so I will give him a gift that reminds me of what he does.” Our feeble attempts at worship and service are not much different from a little girl offering her daddy a cheap little statue. But God looks past the feeble forms and delights in a heart that acknowledges His worth.