

“Our Family Tree: Adam and Eve”

I still have rather vivid memories from one of the family gatherings we had when I was a young boy. We had traveled, as we did each Summer, to visit our relatives in the Midwest. This particular gathering was in La Crosse, Wisconsin. It was where my Dad's parents lived, (my grandparents), and it was where my aunts and uncles and many of my cousins had spent a good amount of time.

There was nothing fancy about the event itself; it was a barbeque with a few salads (and side-dishes), in a place called Granddad's Bluff, overlooking the city of La Crosse (on the one side) and not far from the Mississippi River on the other. As a kid, I know I didn't (fully appreciate) the beauty...but I'll save that for another day.

What I did appreciate that day, about the event (more than anything), was not (so much) the place in which it happened or the food we had to eat, but the stories that were shared by (and about) folks who were all, in one way or another, part of my extended family.

I learned (that day) about my Dad's uncle, Harry, and about the farm he and his family had owned for generations; some of the things they had to do (in the depression years) growing up.

I remember listening to my grandma talk about her eleven sisters and one brother, all living in a three-room house, and about how they always loved it when one of the siblings got married and the (next one in line) ended up with an extra dresser-drawer.

I remember learning about my Dad's cousin, Peetsie, and about how he was the best baseball shortstop the city of La Crosse had ever produced. I wish I could have seen him play.

And (I still remember) a few stories (told that day) about a few members of our more-extended family (that we were told) that day would always remain stories told only among our extended family...if you know what I mean. I learned more about (my family tree) that day than I had ever before known.

Well, today we begin a sermon series in which we're going to be spending time between now and the first week in September, (just before our fall Kickoff), looking at some of the people that make up our more-extended spiritual family. Under the heading of “Our Family Tree,” we're going to be zeroing in on some of the Old Testament characters that we've all known (and heard about), but maybe haven't spent much time with, especially not in our preaching.

In this series, we're going to be doing that. We're going to be taking-on a number of our Family Tree members, talking about their particular stories and, more importantly, talking about how (their stories) are part of our stories, because we are all, in Jesus, part of the same family tree.

Before turning to our most ancient relatives, the true patriarch and matriarch of our family, Adam and Eve, let's start with a word about where this whole story starts. Every story has a start. Today we start where the biblical story starts, in the first book of the Bible, in the book of Genesis.

The word “genesis” means “beginnings” or “origin.” Genesis gives us the beginnings or the origin of everything that follows. It's fascinating how it starts. Every one of the major themes in Scripture is laid out and (played out) in the opening chapters.

In chapter one, we find the story of creation, God being revealed to us for who he is and what he is able to do. He is our Creator. He is the One who brought this world into being. It didn't just happen. God made it happen. It didn't just come about. God is the One who brought it about.

From nothing (that's where it starts), God created everything. Out of chaos, he made (and he gave) everything (in this world) its order and its worth. By the power of his Word, it all came into being. By a simple command, it all happened and took shape.

In six days (is what it says), God created the world. Six 24-hour days? We may never know. Six million-year days? It doesn't really matter. (It's not where we build our faith.) What matters (to our faith) is who did it. What matters (for our faith) is how and why it was done. On the sixth day, he created us, he created people: our very first ancestors. And he created us, he created them, in his image.

Genesis, chapter one, you remember...“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’”

This one verse, if we wanted, could become a summer sermon series in itself. (It really could.) Created as we are, in the image of God, don’t ever lose sight of the significance of that for your life.

When God created this world, he had you and me in mind. When God fashioned and formed this world, he did it for us. (That’s why he did it.) We are the “crown” of his creation. We are the very reason he brought this world into being as he did.

When everything was finished, then he finished everything by creating us. That’s why he did it. In his image, that’s how Adam and Eve were formed. In his likeness, that’s what makes you and me unique (in this world) and stand out. We (and they) were created in the image of God.

Try to imagine (for a moment) what that must have been like for Adam and Eve, to be the very first inhabitants in this world. That’s quite the thought, if you stop and think about it. The very first people to have ever lived, the very first human beings to have walked on this earth.

In the 1960’s, I thought it was special for Neil Armstrong to be the first person to walk on the moon. (Turn the clock way back.) What if you were the first person to have walked on this earth? What if you were the first ones to try whatever it is you chose (in this world) to try?

Just think about it. The first one to go fishing...how would you know what to do? The first one to sing a song...how would you (even know) if you were on tune? (Even I could have sung in that first choir!)

And that whole “naming the animals” thing? How would you have liked that job, to go around and name all of the animals? (It probably would have been fun.) Just think, for a moment. What if Adam would have named a “cat” a “dog”, and a “dog” a “cat”? We’d be walking our cats and pampering our dogs. (That would be weird.)

What if he would have named a “giraffe” an “elephant,” and an “elephant” a “giraffe?” I guess that (would have worked), but it sure would have been different.

That’s what it must have (been like) to be Adam and Eve. That’s what it must have (felt like) to be the first persons to walk on this earth. There was no one else (in the world) from which to learn...except for God. There’s no one else (in the world) for those first inhabitants to turn...except to the one who created it and who created them.

Try to imagine if (every day) you had a choice, and your only choice was to either do what God told you to do, or to do something else. The only option you had, (try to imagine), was to either figure it out (for yourself) or to actually trust that God had it all figured out when he created you as he did?

You tell me. Do you think God had this all figured out when it all started? Do you think, from the genesis of this world, that God had a plan for its beginnings and origin, including what he had in mind for you and for me?

By the power of his Word, it all happened. By the purpose and plan of his perfect will, it all came into being and played out...even in chapter three. Nothing was surprising to God. That first sin? (Remember that story?) Do you think God was caught off-guard when it happened?

Chapter three, along comes the snake, that crafty serpent we call the devil. And what does he do? All he does is to ask a question. All he does is to plant a small and (seemingly insignificant) seed of doubt in the minds of Adam and Eve.

(You remember.) “Did God say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” “Did God say that there was (one tree) from which you were (of all of the trees in the garden) to stay away?”

Eve responded. She said, “(God said), we may eat from the trees in the garden, but God (also said), 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.”

There’s no question (in the story) that Eve knew what God had said, and so did Adam. There’s no doubt (in what transpired) that Adam understood the command, and so did his wife. But that first temptation was so tempting, and the fruit of the tree, it all looked so attractive and enticing and good.

“You will not die” (said the serpent), “for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

And so (that first woman) took a bite, and it all began to unravel. That first man (took his bite), and from that moment on everything changed. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened (it says), and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”

One of my seminary professors used to talk about this third chapter of Genesis (and its subtitle), and he said that almost every Bible (ever printed) has it wrong. In most Bibles, (including the one we’re reading from this morning), the subtitle (for this third chapter) reads, “The Fall of Man.”

“The Fall of Man”...it’s when we first fell from God’s grace. “The Fall of Man”...it’s when we first sinned and it all began to fall apart. The subtitle (as it’s printed) actually works.

My professor used to tell us that it actually does work, but (as it’s printed), it’s missing the point. Because, what happened in that first temptation was not that Adam and Eve chose to fall, but that Adam and Eve, in giving in to the serpent and in (their arrogance and sin), tried their best to “rise up” and be like God.

That was the temptation, to “rise up” and to be like God. That was the serpent’s deception, to make them (and us) think that they (and we) might have a better way.

How foolish and unwise could our first (and most ancient) ancestors have been? How foolish (and unwise) are we, thinking that we might know better than God.

Do you think you know better than God...in anything? Do you think your way (instead of his) will ever, in any way, end up in a better place?

Every major theme in Scripture is found in these opening chapters. Every important lesson for us to learn is given to us in Genesis one to three.

Made in God’s image, a perfect people, a perfect place, a perfect plan...with one little twist: God chose (in his wisdom) to allow them to choose. God decided (out of love) to let them and us decide.

And we all know how it played out. A broken relationship with God, broken relationships with those (in our lives) we are supposed to love, a broken relationship with this world that was (created and given) as such a gift...to say nothing of the physical and spiritual and eternal reality that we all know as death. There are consequences to sin. And they (and we) and our world have been living with them ever since.

The good news in these opening chapters is that the one who was in control from the start, never lost control of what was ultimately his. Even in our sin, even when we thought we had a better way, God still had a saving plan.

Now, when it was first offered, it was still hidden. At the time God first spoke it, it was only a small and tiny word-of-a-glimpse. But it was real, and it was certain, and it was all planned and purposed from the start.

Genesis, chapter three, verse fourteen, (here’s what it says): “So the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity (verse fifteen) between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; (and here’s the promise), he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.’” (“He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”)

A small and tiny word-of-a-glimpse (when it was first spoken); a hidden promise (at best) when it first was offered and given by God...but a real and certain promise that one would come from this same family tree, who would “crush the serpent’s head” and who would ultimately and eternally provide an answer for our sin...and his name would be Jesus Christ.

If you keep reading the story, which we’re going to be doing throughout these summer months, you’ll learn a lot more about this spiritual family to which we are all connected. You’ll find out many things (about your family) that maybe you never knew.

You’ll learn (if you don’t already know) that Adam and Eve had three sons, that the first killed the second, and that the third was born when Adam was 130 years old. You also find out (if you keep reading) that Adam (and Eve) had many other sons and daughters, and that (altogether), Adam lived 930 years, and then he died...and that’s just the start.

Talk about family history. Talk about stories of a not-so-pretty family past. Our first and most ancient ancestors were born perfect. They chose to disobey. They were expelled from the Garden. Nothing has been the same ever since. Their only hope is in Christ.

Sound familiar? It should. It’s the same story as ours. It’s all part of “Our Family Tree.” Amen.