

Rest and Redemption

Genesis 2:1-14

“Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them were finished.”

How wonderful to know that God is faithful to finish His work! Just as He was determined and faithful to complete His new creation, He is absolutely trustworthy regarding every life that has been turned over to Him. Our lives were “tohu va bohu” (Gen 1:2) – empty and meaningless, void and vain. But, as we choose to surrender our will to His, we are ourselves transformed and filled with new life. The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church, *“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ... being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;”* (Phi 1:3-6) And to the Corinthian believers, he wrote, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”* (2 Cor 5:17)

This is so splendid because the faithfulness of God is as absolute as His goodness. This in stark contrast to the entire history of man; you see, my tendency, along with most of yours, is to flake-out, to take the easy route and give up when the task seems impossibly demanding. Now, as I grow in the Lord, becoming more and more aware of

my own wretchedness apart from, I’m increasingly amazed that He doesn’t give up on me. I’m thrilled that He is committed to completing the task of my redemption! Aren’t you?

“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

It’s important to note that this principle of the “shabat”, the Sabbath, predated the Law of Moses. In other words, it’s not something about which you can say, “Oh, I’m a Christian, and I’m not bound by the Law. I don’t need to be concerned about this Sabbath deal. It was just for the Jews of the Old Testament times.” It’s not a matter of being ‘bound’; it’s a matter of wisdom. God is not bound by anything yet He chose to take a day of rest as an example. We should note that in all of His creation story there are only two things which God blessed – man and the Sabbath.

Now, why would God rest? He can’t get tired – He’s omnipotent. Let me suggest the He made Himself a ‘visual aid’ because of the Sabbath’s significance relevant to the central figure in all scripture – Christ. It foreshadows two things – the reign of Christ in the heart of every true believer and His millennial reign on earth.

The former requires ceasing from our own ‘good’ works done in a desperate attempt to create our own

paradise – to earn our salvation or merit God’s blessing.

In chapter one, all that God made was “very good”; then He planted a garden paradise. After it was put in place, He planted man in it, telling him simply to tend it. In other words, man never earned or merited Eden. He never had to work for it; he simply worked in it. The same is true concerning our salvation – it’s grace – the unearned, unmerited gift from God. We don’t work for it either; we just work in it.

The latter rest will be a time in which the world ceases its stormy rebellion. Just as Christ’s Lordship in our hearts means rest (Mat 11:28, 29), so the creation will have rest from its groaning (Rom 8:22) for a thousand years during the millennium.

“This is the history (or generations) of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens...”

Here, we begin a recap from a different angle so to speak – the scripture focuses in on man, the garden of Eden and the manifested heart of God -- wanting man to know the joy of intimate fellowship with Him.

“...before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.”

Before man came on the scene, before the plants, the atmosphere of

the earth was moist and misty. There was no rain – just a gentle mist that watered the whole earth. Now, this is fascinating from an agricultural and scientific view, but more importantly, it pictures the pervasive presence of the Lord’s Word. As such, it’s reminiscent of Isa 55:10, 11 – *“For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, ... so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;”* And, it foreshadows God’s plan – *“Behold, the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts...they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord...”* (Jer 31:31-34) and, *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”* (Isa 11:9) The whole earth shall be filled with the intimate, heartwarming, soul-watering knowledge of the Lord!

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

You know, you’re pretty disgusting. Yes, that’s right – I mean you. And me too! We can be so ‘dusty’ sometimes, that is carnal and ‘earthy’ so to speak. How thankful we should be that, *“He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”* (Psa 103:14) And that should also free us up in a

sense – oh, not to go and ‘flesh-out’, but rather to give our family in the Lord ‘space’ if you know what I mean. We don’t have to go around sin-sniffing, being critical and getting all up tight by their ‘dustiness’.

What’s more, when the devil tells us, “You’re so earthy and sinful!” We can reply, “You don’t know the half of it – it’s worse than your accusation, but that just amplifies our God’s graciousness.” He knows our dustiness and still He loves us individually. He died to cleanse us from all of it. We’ve got an eternal, loving relationship with Him because of that!

“The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden and there He put the man whom He had formed.”

This is great because it exemplifies our Father’s heart again. Adam was resting, he was not on some quest, or tracking down his destiny, yet God put him in paradise. How can we doubt the goodness of God? There was no union contract or binding arbitration on Him – it was His desire and His idea to make this perfect place and then to pop Adam down in the midst of it. In like manner, if we’ll follow Him, he will put us in our perfect place.

Now, you might say, “That’s not my experience! I’ve tried to follow God’s leading and look where I am! What a mess!” or, “If you only knew my wife or my husband or my boss or ...”

OK, if you’ve turned left and you knew God said, “Go right” so to speak, and you find yourself in a precarious position, then you can be comforted in knowing that although

it’s surprising to you, it’s not to God. But you can also rest assured that where ever you are, you can still turn to Him and find yourself back on track. Jonah the prophet was such a man.

God told him to ‘go right’ and speak a warning message to the people of Ninevah. But Jonah headed left to Joppa just as fast as he could. There, he hitched a ride to the furthest part of the earth he knew about – it wasn’t just ‘left’ but ‘left-field’, in fact the ‘left field bleachers!’ But God is faithful with His children.

You know the story – Jonah went down to Joppa, then down to the ship, then down into the hold of the ship, then down into the stormy sea as the crew threw him overboard, and finally down into the belly of the great fish. Jonah thought he was as far from God as any man could be. Nevertheless, the Bible says, *“the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah.”* You see, even as he was trying to hide from God, Father had prepared his own ‘Eden’ – his own perfect place, that is, the perfect place for Jonah, the place Jonah needed to be.

It was there amongst the gastric juices that Jonah discovered the salvation of God and that God was committed to him even in spite of his rebellion. He said, *“Out of the belly of Sheol (the grave) I cried, and You heard my voice.”* So Jonah, probably bleached and putrid, cried out to the Lord and up and out he went – vomited onto the beach. Though we may stray, our God loves us and nothing in all of creation is stronger than His gracious love.

How much better, though, to be obedient to the voice of the Lord. There’s a wonderful peace of mind when you’re trusting that where you are is where you’re meant to be; even if it doesn’t seem like ‘Club Med’, your ‘garden’ is the perfect place for YOU.

“And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Isn’t it interesting that He placed both of these important trees right in the middle of the garden. One vital, one lethal. When the serpent lured Eve, it wasn’t as if she had gone hiking into some obscure region of the paradise. To do good or to do evil is always in close proximity. As a matter of fact, we can’t really consider her as ‘out of bounds’ in the sense of, “Eve, what are you doing hanging around that tree?!”

You see, based upon what God said in Gen 3:22, eating of the Tree of Life was necessary for eternal life. You could say that although Adam was designed for eternity, the design included a specification – eating of the Tree of Life. Whether this was a one time requirement or a periodic one we don’t know, but we can be assured that in order to keep on living, at some point, Adam and Eve had to come to the Tree of Life and consequently into the locale of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The old adage, love demands a choice, is surely true, and what’s more, LIFE demands a choice. Everyone must, at some point,

come to the Tree of Life – it is also in the immediate proximity of the Tree of Death. In fact, they are one in the same -- found on Calvary. If you will eat of the ‘bloody’ fruit of the Tree of Life, you will live – it is the blood of Christ (see John 6:54)

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” (1Pet 2:24)

But if you listen to the serpent, you’ll eat the wrong fruit – doubting God’s goodness and love. You will reject God’s provision for life and eat death. Everyone must at some point make a choice at the Tree. Even as Moses spoke before Israel, *“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:”* (Deut 30:19)

“Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads.”

The number four in scripture signifies the world – you have the four seasons, the four corners of the earth, the four winds and such. Here, the river that watered the paradise of Eden also flowed out and watered the world around it. In like manner, the water of God’s Word (Eph 5:26) that blesses the hearts of those in paradise (the saved) is intended also to overflow into the world around. The following four rivers will illustrate for us how God has ordained for that to happen.

“The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which runs

through the whole land of Havilah where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there.

In the Bible, names are very important. Unlike today, where we name someone or something with a name that just sounds nice, these people and places were named either descriptively or prophetically. Names were powerful and meaningful. And wouldn't you know it --in the names of these rivers, we find a picture of our Savior.

The first is Pishon which means a "great effusion", that is, a fountain or great overflowing. Consider that Jesus said, "*He who believes in Me as the scripture has said, out of his heart (his garden) will flow rivers (literally torrents or great effusions) of living water.*" (John 7:38) In addition, Havilah means "one that suffers pain". How appropriate that is when you consider that this is exactly what the love and life of Christ does – it overflows from the heart of the believer and winds its way throughout the places of pain and suffering all around. Christ Himself also suffered more than we can know, as did the Father, to make this fountain possible.

I like the fact that there is gold in those places – good gold (see 1 Pet 1:7). For it is in our deepest difficulties that we discover the treasures of faith, hope and trust in our God – eternal riches.

"The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes throughout the whole land of Cush."

Now, Gihon has two meanings and they are both important – first, a "great eruption of waters" and then

"the valley of grace". Where in the life of Christ do we witness a great eruption or breaking out of water and does it have anything to do with grace?

Back to the Tree. If we look to the cross, we find the answer. There, as He hung, now dead, John the apostle recorded: "*Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.*" (John 19:32-34) In piercing His pericardium swollen with water, it erupted. We know that in times of extreme grief and sorrow, this sack around the heart can fill with fluid. It has been said quite accurately that although Christ did not die from a broken heart, He died with one.

Here is the eruption that was and is the perfect expression of God's grace. That flow finds its way to the low places, the valleys in this world – that's where grace is needed. In fact, it flows through Cush. Cush means "blackness". The man named Cush was the father of Nimrod who became the legendary rebel against God and initiated what many scholars believe to be the original post-diluvian false religious system. Oh, how appropriate when you consider the scripture, "*For where iniquity abounds, there does grace much more abound.*" (Rom 5:20)

"The name of the third river is Hiddekel (or Tigris); it is the one which borders the east of Assyria (or Asshur)."

Hiddekel means a "sharp voice" and indeed, Christ's voice, though He did not shout, was sharp as a sword for He spoke the Word of God. In fact, He IS the Word of God. It was said of Him prophetically, "*Listen, O coastlands, to Me and take heed, you peoples from afar!* (The Tigris is one of the longest rivers in the world.) *The Lord has called Me from the womb; from the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;*" (Isa 49:1,2)

In concert, Hebrews says, "*For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*" (Heb 4:12)

That this river borders Assyria is poignant, for Assyria means "one who is happy and walks on prosperously". You see, as we take heed to the Word of God and make it the border or parameter-provider of our life, we grow into the abundant spiritual life God desires for us.

"The fourth river is the Euphrates."

Now, Euphrates has two meanings as well – "fertilizing" and "fruitful". Unlike today where we have all sorts of chemicals to mix into soil, fertilizing was historically the result of mixing with the soil some animal or plant life that had died or some other biological refuse. The result, of course, was increased fruitfulness.

Again, this is the Lord Jesus. He was rejected by His own people –

refuse, if you would, and He died, was buried and indeed 'fertilized' the Kingdom soil. The heart-soil in which He planted the seed of His Words. And He has indeed brought forth fruit – great fruitfulness – eternal life.

This river is the only one which has no described course and that's perfect for Christ died for the sins of the whole world. The gift of eternal life is for anyone who will receive it. It's not limited to any people or nation. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*" (John 3:16)

May God bless you as you consider the illuminating pictures He has placed within His Word. What a comfort to see that Christ's sacrifice was not a 'fix' for an unforeseen disaster. God knows what He's doing – always did, always does, always will. This little section might be called His design for rest and redemption.

Was man's fall a surprise to God? No way. Neither is yours. But rest and redemption are ever found in Him. Let His grace flow into the valley of your life. Open your heart to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and eat the fruit of His Tree of Life. Eternal life is found at the cross of Calvary. Believe in the risen Lord and Savior, Jesus. It's not too late.