

Sermon – 17th February 2019
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Today we start working our way through the Bible as part of our sermon series which is following the Bible Course.

Today we are starting at the very beginning, a very good place to start I hear you say, with the book of Genesis.

I was a librarian at secondary school. The only reason was because you got to stay inside when it was cold and wet. There were all sorts of categories of book in that library. I wonder what type of book you would categorise the Bible as.

You may say religion, history, poetry, ethics, drama, prayer and there's many other possible categories of course. But I want to suggest that the most appropriate category for the Bible is that it is a love story.

I read of a principal at a theological college who told his students that there was one page in the Bible that should be torn out of it. It is the page that says The New Testament. It divides the Bible into two sections. But the principal wanted his students to understand that the Bible is one long continuous account of God's love for us and his never ending pursuit of a relationship with those that he loves; that is you and me.

The Bible may be a book of books, sixty six in fact, but the beginning, the middle and the end are all about God's love for us.

For those of you who have been parents, I wonder if you can recall the moment that you first set eyes on your child; your creation. I remember my first daughter being wheeled out of the delivery room into the waiting room in a little crib, where I was anxiously waiting. As I looked into the crib, there was this little sweaty, pale, wrinkled face looking at me, and that was just the midwife pushing the trolley.

No I joke. It was my beautiful daughter. And at that moment I felt an overwhelming sense of love, as well as an immense sense of pride and responsibility.

I want to suggest that that is what we read in the opening chapter of Genesis. It is a story of overwhelming love, pride and responsibility. We read in Genesis chapter one that 'God created humankind in his image...male and female he created them...and blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'

And then in verse 31, 'God saw everything that he had made and indeed it was very good'. God's creation was perfect, just like my daughter.

Adam and Eve were created for relationship with and dependence on God. But then like many children, there was an act of disobedience that resulted in that relationship being damaged. They been told not to do something and of course they did.

I recall going out one day with my wife Jayne and telling my daughter, who was about 14 at the time not to do anything silly. We arrived back home later in the day and there in a fish tank was a rat. My daughter had taken it on herself to go to the pet shop and buy it. I was not happy at her or the pet shop and neither was Jayne and the rat quickly went back to the pet shop. I had trusted my daughter and she had been disobedient.

It didn't mean though that I didn't love her. But there were consequences. She was sent to her room to reflect on what she had done. In the same way Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were sent out from God's presence. But that didn't mean that God didn't love them.

And then Genesis continues by relating the story of how humanity had become disobedient. And not just disobedient but wicked. In Genesis chapter 6 verse 5, we read 'The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.'

God wanted to be in a loving relationship with them but they had turned their back on God. God's judgement was that it was irretrievable and that the only way forward was to have a fresh start. That didn't mean that God didn't care. We read in verse 6 that doing so 'grieved him to his heart'. Just like a loving father having to discipline a child; it is not easy.

But God determined that there was no alternative. That fresh start was to come through one man and his family. We read 'that Noah found favour in the sight of the Lord'...(for he) was a righteous man.

He did the craziest thing ever. He built an enormous boat in the middle of a desert. How stupid was that? All around him thought he was mad but he was being obedient to God. And it was Noah's obedience to God that led to him being called righteous. And as you will recall, there was the flood which is when Noah's madness was not madness at all. He and his family were to be the new Adam and Eve. And just as God had said to them, he told Noah and his family 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'.

And then several chapters later we come across a very strange scene. A man holding a knife over the chest of a young boy that he is about to sacrifice. How could God command someone to sacrifice his own son? That man was Abraham and like Noah, he was completely obedient to God.

In Genesis chapter 12, God appeared to Abram, as he was known at that time, and made a covenant with him; a formal agreement. Abram, who was 75 years old at the time, was to leave his country, his people – including relatives – and go to a strange land that God would show him.

God's part of the bargain was to make Abram into a great nation, bless him and make him a blessing. Through Abram all the nations of the earth would be

blessed. Quite a spectacular agreement when you consider that Abram chose to trust a deity he had never met before.

For some reason, Abram believed the Lord and did as he was asked. And Genesis records that 'God credited it to him as righteousness'. (Genesis 15:6) Abram became Abraham and his wife Sarah.

And it was not until he was 100 years old that he and Sarah were to have the child that they so desperately craved. They named the child Isaac. And it was Isaac's chest that the knife was being held over. You may recall though, that at the last moment, God told him to stop and a ram was provided as the sacrifice.

Two thousand years later though, on a mountain in the region of Moriah, the same place that Abraham was when he was about to sacrifice Isaac, not a ram but a lamb was sacrificed; the Lamb of God. God's only son.

That is another reason why the principal said that the page should be torn out. This was always part of God's plan from the beginning. Jesus was always part of the story of God's love and God's plan to bring us back into relationship with the God that loves us so much that he was willing to sacrifice his son.

God knew what was going to happen, and he knew what it was going to cost him. He knew what you were going to cost - and then went ahead and did it anyway.

That is why I say that the Bible is God's love story for you and me. The Bible is one long continuous account of God's love for us and his never ending pursuit of a relationship with those that he loves.

The story doesn't stop there though. Isaac had a son called Jacob, who later became known as Israel. Jacob then went on to have twelve sons, one of which was Joseph; the same Joseph that we hear about in the musical 'Joseph and The Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat'. And it was ten of Jacob's sons and two of Joseph's that become the twelve tribes of Israel.

God made a covenant with Abraham, an agreement, that his descendants would more numerous than the stars and that is just what happened. But more than that, Abraham was told that all nations of earth would be blessed through him.

The first name in Jesus family tree recorded in the gospel of Matthew is Abraham. And through Jesus we too have become part of that family. When we trust in Jesus, we are adopted into God's family and become part of that blessing and part of God's story of love.

And the story continues again next week. Amen