

September 23, 2018

## Lesson 4: God Created The Family

Scripture: Genesis 2:18-24; 4: 1-2

### Context:

In this week's lesson, we dive into God's creation of the family. There are two parts that we read that give us a complete look at how the ancient Israel people understood the core units of family. The text gives us the knowledge that we have been created to live in relationship with God and with other human beings.

The first scripture passage continues with the second creation story that starts off describing how the first humans came from the land. After man is made, the Lord decided that the man would need help. All the animals are brought forward ranging from livestock to the birds to the wild animals. It's a beautiful scene.

Yet the scene is not complete because there is no helper for the man. God cannot be the helper. The animals cannot be the helper. So God is once again creative and this time makes a woman. Using the rib of the man, the Lord God fashions a woman. In addition to setting up the pair of man and woman, the text also gives a cultural response to what happens when a man grows up. In verse twenty-four, we read that the reason for this creation narrative was to explain that when a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife, they become one together. The closing verse focusing on our nudity is to suggest that nudity itself is not sinful, but that when nudity is used to exploit others is when the line is crossed.

The second part of the passage moves to the act of procreation by which families are formed. We are told that Adam knows his wife Eve intimately and she conceives. We are introduced to the oldest Cain, whose name translates to Qanah, which means "to get, to create."<sup>1</sup> The name is given as a praise to God.<sup>2</sup> Following Cain's birth we are given Abel, whose name means "vapor, nothingness."<sup>3</sup> Once again, we are set up with a theme that will arise in Genesis in which the oldest brother will not fair as well as the younger brother.

The text closes with the introduction of the brothers' vocations, Cain farming the fertile land and Abel caring for the flocks as a shepherd. There is no doubt that there is an allusion to the conflict between the farmers and shepherds of the ancient world, especially concerning their relationship to God.<sup>4</sup> As most ancient cultures believed in animal sacrifice for sins, farmers would have felt that they were shortchanged in what they gave to God. Thus, we see that family tensions are not something that we just deal

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggeman, "Genesis," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1982), 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

with today. Family tension has existed even before any of us were born.

### **Application**

There are several application pieces here that affirm God's creation. The first is that we as humans are not meant to live life alone. John Donne once wrote: "No man is an island..." While the poem is not exactly about two becoming one, it is an affirmation that we all need helpers in life. For some people, this comes through the act of marriage where two people experience the love of Christ in one another. A marriage can be a place where people can truly explore the love of God in a covenantal relationship. Yet marriage is not just the place where people were created for each other. In general, our beings were meant for socialization. We were meant to laugh together, cry together, exercise together, and help one another. The text focuses on the fact that the first human needed someone beside them to enjoy life. Even as an introvert, I realize that I need to be with other human beings at time. We weren't to meant to do life with those around us.

The second application for this piece is to appreciate our family. For some people, their biological family is all they know and need in order to live in this world. Especially in the South, we love our relatives as the odds are that you'll be related to over half a county if you've stayed in the same area. This can be a tremendous blessing especially when it comes to crises and moments of joy. There is a group of people with whom you share the same heritage and there is a special kind of pride in the characteristics that distinguish your family.

In my own life, I have relatives who give me strength and have constantly shown me God's love since the day I was born. They have watched me grow up and consider me one of their own. I give thanks to God for them and the constant love as they comfort me in times of need, encourage me on my journey, counsel me when I am confused, and laugh with me at the craziness of our other relatives. (Because we all have those relatives who do occasionally make us laugh for multiple reasons.)

Yet I am also reminded that God's creation of the family may extend beyond our biological families. I have also been fortunate to grow up with people who are surrogate "aunts" and "brothers." These people help me remember my roots and are always there for me. I am reminded that the family we have in Christ is so much bigger when we can love and depend on others, even those who are not biologically related to us. Who is part of your family and how do you appreciate them?

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