

“Who is in Charge?”

**Genesis 2: 15-17; 3: 1-7; Matthew 5:
43-48**

We continue our series on “Talking the Talk.” This portion of the series is in February. We conclude the series via study groups during Lent on “Walking the Walk.” So, our overall intention is to “Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk. It seems only appropriate that we do both sides of this Christian coin. Our talk or our beliefs as well as our action or efforts we make as Christians. As was observed last week, there is no value in discovering the truth if it does not impact and influence how we live our lives. As

scripture declares, “by their fruits, you will know them.”

Last week on Creation, we uncovered three truths:

1. God created everything in the world and therefore everything belongs to God. We own nothing.
2. God creating the world put value on the created order and therefore it is holy, or in other words, set apart.
3. God decided for some strange reason to partner with us human beings to manage and take charge of this creation. We are partners with God.

Today, we move to our second

foundational belief: “Who is in Charge?”

In theological terms, it is about the Providence of God or the Sovereignty of God. A corollary concept with this doctrine is the issue of evil in the world.

First the Providence of God.

Providence is defined as the act of seeing and providing for the future. In scripture, it refers to God’s foresight and power. It is God’s way to watch over and protect and provide for the creation.

We often declare that in the Providence of God, I was able to get that job. By God’s Providence, I was spared harm in that accident. That God’s

Providence looked out after me and I did not make that horrible investment.

We also declare that by the grace of God I was spared agony and remorse. God’s grace was sufficient to meet my needs. God’s grace helped me say the right words.

Our first hymn today was written by William Cowper. He wrote the words to “God moves in a Mysterious Way,” #30 in the hymnbook. The story behind the hymn is powerful.

Cowper often struggled with depression and doubt. One night he decided to commit suicide by drowning himself. He called a cab and told the

driver to take him to the Thames River. However, thick fog came down and prevented them from finding the river. After driving around lost in the fog, the cabby finally stopped to let Cowper out. To Cowper's surprise, he found himself on his own doorstep. God had sent the fog to keep him from killing himself. Even in our weakest moments, God watches over us.

I would think that story would resonate with a lot of us. And I would think most of us have a similar story to William Cowper - - maybe not as dramatic, but just as real. We are clear in our own life that the hand of God was

working in our lives and we have life now. Or God's hand was working in our lives and we have a whole new life and direction.

Everything, we hold, happens for a purpose. There is a reason behind all that occurs. We may not know right away what that is. Yet, in time and reflection, we can see the hand of God working in our lives:

That missed phone call you got.

That job interview that did poorly in.

That customer you did not sell.

That delay in you getting to a location.

That misunderstood message that caused you to do something differently.

All of which turned things in a new and different direction in your life.

Surprising new direction. Challenging new direction. And yet, God was in charge. God was in control. God gave you a new focus.

Cliff Barrows served as Billy Graham's life-long associate and song leader. In 1945, Barrows and his fiancée, Billie, had scraped together enough money for a simple wedding and two train tickets to a city with a resort hotel. On arrival, they discovered the hotel shut down. Stranded in an unfamiliar city,

they thumbed a ride. A sympathetic driver took them to a grocery store owned by a woman the driver knew. The newlyweds spent their first night in a room above the store.

The next day when the lady heard Cliff playing Christian music on his trombone, she invited them to spend the rest of their honeymoon at a friend's house. Several days later the host invited them to attend a youth rally where a young evangelist was speaking. The song leader that night was sick, and Cliff was asked to take charge of the music for the service. The young evangelist, of course,

was Billy Graham. The two became partners for decades.

Amazing how some circumstances present themselves and life changes. It is a true gift for those who have eyes to see.

There is order. There is purpose. Yet, there is another side. The dark side of the created order. The dark side of life. Evil.

Shirley Guthrie in his book, Christian Doctrine, calls it the “dark side” of creation. He suggests several aspects of nature and life that are not “good” as we heard in the Creation story. Things

happen due to human ineptness or natural law or negligence.

A person develops lung cancer and had never smoked.

A hurricane devastates a coast line city.

Tornadoes rip through the Midwest with devastation all over.

A plane crashes because of human error or weather conditions.

Wars and rumors of wars abound and we wonder how long, O Lord.

The abuse of women and children in family situations.

Sex trafficking of adolescent girls.

The rampant use of addictive drugs causing 100,000 deaths last year.

Did God cause these things to happen? Are tragedies ways for God to punish sinners? Is God attempting to get even with his creation? Is God mad at God's partners for messing up the created order he did in six days?

My question is, "Does God cause evil in the world OR Does God allow evil in the world?" It makes no sense that God would go to all the trouble of creating our world and then send plagues and heartaches and suffering on the very creation he called good!

God did allow for free will and it seems that as we make certain choices and decisions, there are results. There are consequences for the decisions we make. If we keep eating unhealthy foods, we will have health problems. If you drive on the wrong side of the road, you probably will have a serious accident. If you are so angry at someone to the point of hating them, you may in an irrational moment harm them bodily. It is all part of our self-centeredness. All part of our ego. All part of being the "center" of the universe, at least from our perspective.

I think it helpful to look at the origin of some of our free-will behavior. We

read Genesis 2: 15-17 as part of the Old Testament passage. It is part of the creation story. And as Walter Brueggeman in his commentary declares, these verses are instructive about our inner being.

He suggests in this story that God declares three things for human beings:

Vocation

Permission

Prohibition.

Verse 15: we are told God put man in the Garden with a job. With a vocation to till the Garden and keep it. Human beings were created with a vocation. We have a calling. We have a purpose for

being. Not to be farmers, necessarily, but to have a calling to which we can invest our lives: Vocation.

Verse 16: God gives us permission to eat freely of every tree in the garden except one. It was ours to use as we choose. We were free to enjoy:

Permission

Verse 17: God did restrict our freedom so we were not allowed to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There were restrictions. Today, we call it boundaries. Do all you desire, God declares, except one thing: there was a prohibition.

Humanity did well with verses 15 and 16, but were not going to be told what we could not do in verse 17. We got nervous. We got scared. We were anxious as we could be. We could not stand it to have restrictions. And so out of anxiety, we created issues and problems. We made mistakes. We did not treat others well. We had to be in control. We had to be successful.

I am not sure it was that we are evil and bad. Rather, I think we had issues about trusting God. We have issues about having a fairly clear path to take to freedom and full life. We were not satisfied and we wanted more. We were

going to push the limits and thought we could handle the forbidden fruit. Yet, we were not able to do that. We wanted more. We were not satisfied. And we have not changed even today. We strive for:

- more wealth
- more security
- more power
- more control
- more dominance
- more aggressiveness
- more superiority

Because we are ANXIOUS. We are nervous. We want everything clearly defined and controlled. Because we

believe we know the difference between good and evil. Which is God's job, not our job. Yet, we keep reaching for the prized ring. And end up short every time. Just leave it alone!

Part of the good news amid this negative sounding message is that God is Sovereign. It is God's Providence. It is God's ball game and God is in charge. So that even though things do not go well often in life, God takes the tragedy, God takes the mishap, God takes that untimely death and uses it for God's glory. God did not cause it to happen. God did not will the tragedy. Yet God takes our

calamities and turns them into hope, into victories, into a new life.

Therein is our hope. Therein is our victory. God takes what appears to be defeat and make it a victory.

C. H. Spurgeon tells a story that speaks to God's Providence:

It was Mrs. Hannah Moore who went into a place where they were manufacturing carpet. She said, "There is no beauty in that carpet." The salesman responded to her, "It is one of the most beautiful carpets you ever saw." She retorted by saying "Why, here is a piece hanging out, and it is all in disorder." "Do you know why, ma'am, he asked?"

You are looking at the wrong side of the carpet!

Do we look at the wrong side of creation and of life? Are we looking at the wrong side in everything we do? Are we seeing everything in negative fashion instead of the possibilities that exist therein?

I think the same can be said about Good Friday. We were sad, dejected, and discouraged. The Savior of the world was dead, dead! All hope had been shattered for the disciples. And for some people I'm sure it was the end.

Yet Easter Sunday morning was three days later. The tomb was empty.

The dead body gone. The Savior of the world had arisen. Out of the dark side of creation, some real hope and real life changing occurred. People were amazed.

Sometimes I worry we focus too much on Good Friday. And we have to ask ourselves the question, are we Good Friday people OR are we Easter Sunday people? Is there new life or are we enslaved to the old life?

In the Providence of God, we are Easter people. People of hope. People of possibility. People of the future.

So, who is in charge? Who do you say?