

## **Adventures Behind the Waterfall – Creatorly Intent**

### **Psalm 98 / John 15:5-17**

#### **Behind the Waterfall – Adventures in the Old Testament**

If, like me, you have grown up with the Adventures of Tintin, then you'll not be able to see a waterfall without wonder what treasures lie behind it. Today we're beginning a new series of sermons on the Old Testament – but the Old Testament is such a huge and often difficult book that it's not easy to know where to start. So we're just going to jump in – or plunge through the waterfall – at various points and rope that takes us through will be a particular theme.

So next week we're considering dysfunctional families in the Old Testament – which covers most Old Testament history! Then we're going to look at people who maintained their faith in a hostile public arena; then we've got something on mental illness looking at Elijah and Saul; we've got a sermon on some of the great women of the Old Testament; there's sermons on the jealousy of God, a pastoral approach to Job, the theme of hope, Jesus, and finally God's faithfulness. Hopefully these sermons will all be interesting, informative, and inspiring. If they're not, there's no money back, but you can write to our Customer Services department, who will understand your situation, refuse to apologise for legal reasons, log your complaint, and do nothing about it.

#### **Creatorly Intent**

Today I want to talk about a theme that runs right through the whole of the Bible, and if you read any verse with this idea in mind then you'll nearly always be fruitful. The theme is God's Creatorly Intent – his powerful will as Creator, his desire as the Maker of all things. Read any part of the Bible and ask “What does this tell me about God the Maker's heart, desire, or intention?” and you'll often find it has something to say. So today I'm going to talk about God's Creatorly Intent.

#### **Powerful Intent.**

I've often been attracted by the idea of running in the London Marathon. The trouble is, I'd get puffed out by the time I was at the end of the road. I went jogging once. I know my limitations! I can sprint – over increasingly shorter distances – but anything beyond say, my front door and a waiting episode of “Life on Mars” is about the limit.

The Old Testament, that is the Bible as Jesus knew it, begins with God's powerful Creation, and the theme is sustained right the way through. God is a long-distance runner. We often read the Bible as the story of

Redemption, but why should God want to redeem the world? It's because he first of all Created it. The Scriptures begin with accounts of Creation that emphasise the sovereign power of God: He says the word and it's done – just as Jesus will later say the word in healing, and it is done.

### **Persona Intent**

Secondly God's creatorly intent is immensely personal. We're not introduced to a "life-force" but one who *formed* Adam from the dust of the earth – and while he was asleep, fashioned Eve from his rib. These ancient stories testify to an immensely personal God. Then when things go wrong. We read **"The Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth and it grieved him to his heart."** (Gen. 6:6) Sending the flood is a deeply personal decision, and as Noah is about to set sail we read, **"the Lord shut him in."** (Gen. 7:16)

Fathers 4 Justice is a campaign for fathers to be personally involved in the lives of their children. The Bible shows God as highly personally involved. He responds to people in slavery, saying of their escape, **"I carried you on eagles' wings."** Later on, he says of them, **"It was I who taught you to walk."** (Hosea 11) The campaign says "A father is for life, not just conception." And the Old Testament says God is Creator for eternity – he didn't just make the watch and set it going.

When we're in the midst of life it's very hard to discern the divine hand. The Old Testament histories were put together after the events they describe, with hindsight, perspective, prayer, reflection. And from this later vantage point the writers, guided by the Holy Spirit, were able to see how personally God had been involved all along.

Even though we may not know it now, the lesson is that God is *still* personally involved in our world – and even in our individual lives. It's not always easy to see the contours of the interface, and then something happens – a coincidence or "God-incidence", a prayer we know has been answered, a sense of God's presence. Suddenly we know exactly what the writer of Genesis means when he said "And God shut the door of the ark." He was *that* close to us - *that* personally involved!

So God's creatorly intent is powerful and personal.

### **Participative Intent**

When the Old Testament describes God as Creator it doesn't just picture him, say, in his workshop or studio, busily inventing new things to delight and astonish. Rather, he's designed the world to actually participate in the on-going creation. Adam is told to name the animals and to serve the earth. Later on, God tells the people to let the ground remain fallow: he's not just saying this will be to your economic benefit, but that the earth has a "right" to its Sabbath rest – the seventh year. (Lev. 26:34-35)

Everything's interconnected. Everything's related. Everything plays its part. All creation praises God, and all creation suffers when one part goes wrong. We know all too well in these days of global warming, how human activity affects the earth and vice versa. At last we can see what the Bible's been saying in story form all along: Adam and Eve disobey God and as a result **"the ground is cursed"** (Gen. 3:17); in Egypt, Pharaoh continues to oppress the people and the whole land is plagued; and in our own day we see the world over, how unrighteous government leads to ruin of the land.

That's the risk God takes as Creator: he makes the whole universe with freedom. He calls us all to play our part with him, with each other, and with the rest of Creation. And when Creation praises him it's not because he's set us up to pander to his ego - God didn't make the world just so we could tell him how brilliant he is – the praise of all creation is simply the exuberant rejoicing that happens when things are in the right order and working well. All creation is affected when God's redemption comes and lives are put back in order. Isaiah 44 says, **"burst into song you mountains, you forests, and all you trees, for the Lord has redeemed Jacob."** (v.23) All creation gives thanks because actually all creation is affected by the fruit of new life ordered by God and the Holy Spirit, rather than disordered by sin.

So God's creatorly intent is powerful, it's personal, it's participative.

### **Purposeful Intent**

God has a purpose for this world and for us who live in it. **"be fruitful"** he said to Noah after the flood. (Gen. 9:7) And much later, Jesus said to his disciples: **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in them, they will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing... You did not choose me, but I chose you... to go and bear much fruit."** (John 15:5, 16) In these verses Jesus shows the *participative* aspect of God's intent – we are the branches in his vine – and the *purposeful* aspect: to go and bear much fruit.

What does it mean to bear fruit? The other day I was round someone's house and I saw a fruit I'd never seen before. It was a mango, but a different variety than the ones you get in Sainsburys. My host gave it to me to take away and try. I have to say, it was absolutely delicious. I'd lost faith in mangoes after several years of the hard stringy things the supermarkets sell, but this one was nourishing both to the body and soul!

That's God's Creatorly intention for us – that we should participate in his will, and *be nourishing to the body and soul of others*, and indeed, the body and soul of this world. When you think about that commission it takes us right into *every* sphere of life: Caring for the body of the earth, (God said to Adam, "Serve the earth"); justice for the poor; kindness for the suffering; education - nourishment for the mind; loving surprises for tired spirits; there are so many ways in which we can be fruitful in God's world.

## **Your Intent**

So what might you take away from these thoughts?

First of all, you might make a **personal** response of thanks for God's powerful yet personal activity in this world and our lives; And within that you might praise him that *everything* in this world is made by him, and comes from him, and so you might want to dedicate a particular aspect of your life to him.

Secondly, you might want to make a **practical** response and think in God's presence of those you're close to – how can you bear the good fruit of Jesus' tree of life for them to be nourished in body and soul?

Thirdly, you might want to make a **political** response, looking at the wider picture and asking yourself who, or what causes, do I ally myself with? Maybe I'm going to make a stand for something at work, in the community, or the wider world.

Fourthly, you might want to make a **planetary** response, in other words, an ecological one: how will you interact with the non-human parts of Creation; how will you nourish the soul of the planet and serve the earth?

However you might take this opportunity into your life today, I pray that you'll take your place in the creative purpose of God, and participate with him in living his will.