**WGC**

**September 25, 2016**

Advocates of the abortion industry say it’s better to have an abortion than an accidental child. Needless to say, I disagree. There are other far better options than taking a life. Nevertheless, I understand why they say that. Accidental children find themselves on a trail of sorrows long before they are born.

In 1988 a group of researchers did a study in Sweden, Finland and Czechoslovakia. In each country, they followed a group of unwanted children and a group of wanted children from the time of their conception until adulthood. <https://birthpsychology.com/content/born-unwanted-developmental-effects-denied-abortion>; retrieved Sept 21, 2016.

I was not surprised by the fact that, by age 23, the unwanted children showed a greater tendency “to social problems, criminal activity and had triple the amount of serious repeated offenses requiring custodial sentences.”

What surprised me was the difference between anticipated and accidental babies soon after birth: “At 28 days after birth, measurements revealed that unwanted babies were smaller in weight and length, and a greater proportion of them had been born prematurely. These children had a significantly higher infant mortality rate … and had higher incidences of all types of handicaps.”

For the past couple of weeks, I’ve repeated that refrain that, as human beings, we don’t just love stories; we need them. Stories are to our spirits what food and drink are to our bodies. If food and drink give our bodies the vitamins, proteins and nutrients they need, stories feed our spirits with purpose, meaning and value, especially our BIG stories.

BIG stories answer the BIG questions of life. They tell us how we got here, why we’re here, where we’re headed, how to live in the meantime. In answering those questions, they also tell us whether we were wanted or unwanted, anticipated or accidental.

The BIG story our society has embraced is the Secular Story. The Secular Story tries to answer all the BIG questions of life without reference to God. According to it, our world and our existence are chance products of the laws that govern the universe. In other words, we are accidental beings.

In 2004, the World Health Organization projected that, “by 2030, the amount of disability and life lost as a result of depression will be greater than that resulting from any other condition, including accidents, war, suicide, cancer and stroke.”

“But we don’t need to wait [until 2030]. The depression epidemic is already at hand.” Already now, “depression is the predominant cause of illness and disability for boys and girls aged 10 to 19 years.” <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jonathan-rottenberg/the-depression-epidemic-will-not-be-televised_b_5367479.html>; retrieved Sept, 21, 2016.

I realise that it’s foolish to reduce the cause of depression to a single factor; it’s far too complicated for that; but I can’t help but see a connection between the remarkable rise in depression and the BIG story we’re being told. According to it, we’re accidental. That’s bound to have an effect on the way we see ourselves and the way we function, just like being unwanted has an effect on a baby long before it’s born.

Last week, we started looking at the BIG story of the Bible. I call this story HIStory. Not only is it rooted in history; it’s the story of our Redeemer and Leader, Jesus Christ. He made this story the foundation of his life. He was and is the climax of this story. He is also its main actor or character.

Last week, we saw that the BIG story of the Bible is the story of an enormous detour. The road to God’s glorious future for us became impassable to us; and so God put us on an alternate route.

God’s original goal for HIStory was and still is to populate the renewed earth with people who live in unbroken fellowship with himself. That’s God’s glorious future for us. He wants to live in unending community with you and me.

The road to that future is trust freely given, trust expressed in obedience. There can be no friendship without trust; there can be no fellowship without faith freely given. Hebrews 11:6 says, *Without faith it is impossible to please God.*

Our first parents started off on that road; but they soon broke trust and decided to do their own thing in their own way. All of us have followed their lead; and as a result the road to God’s future for us has become impassable to us. On our own, we will always doubt God and end up disobeying his Word. Speaking of the human race, Romans 3:10 says, *They’ve all taken the wrong turn; they've all wandered down blind alleys.*

Rather than abandoning us, though, God has put the human race on a long detour designed to regain our trust. I want you to think about that for a second: The almighty Creator of the universe bothering to pursue us and fight for our faith. Instead of ditching us the moment we ditched him, the BIG story of the Bible is all about God coming after us time and time again to win our trust and draw us into his unending fellowship. I say, “Wow!”

Like we saw last week, the BIG Story of the Bible consists of seven Acts. The reason I see seven Acts is because the story of the Bible is built around seven covenants that God has made with people.

A covenant is similar and different than a contract. Like a contract, a covenant binds two people or parties into an agreement through promises and requirements: “I’ll do A; and you must do B. If either of us fails to hold up our end of the deal, there are consequences.” That describes both a contract and a covenant.

Unlike a contract, a covenant is meant to last a lifetime. A contract is done when I’ve completed A and you’ve delivered B. A covenant is meant to bind two people or parties together until one of them dies.

At the heart of each Act of HIStory, there is a covenant between God and people. These covenants consist of promises and requirements designed to draw God and people into a trust relationship.

Today we look at the first Act. Like each of the other Acts, this one includes four elements. The mighty act of God in this Act is the act of creation. The gracious gift of God is the stewardship he has given us. The solid promise of God is unbroken fellowship. The universal call of God is to trust.

Together, these four elements make up God’s first step toward achieving his goal of populating the planet with people who live in fellowship with him.

Together, these four elements tell us that we are wanted beings. Despite what your parents might have felt about your coming, you were not an accident. In God’s story, you and I are intended, important, invaluable and interdependent.

Let’s look at Act 1 of HIStory.

**The first element in this Act is the act of creation, which tells us that we were intended.**

Needless to say, there’s a lot about God’s act of creation that could occupy our time and attention. For the sake of this overview, all we’re going to focus on is the Why of creation. Why did God create the heavens, the earth and human beings?

If you were with us last week, you will know the answer. God created the heavens, the earth and human beings not because he was bored or lonely, but out of an abundance of love.

The God of the Bible is not a solitary being who exists at a distance from his creation. No, the God of the Bible is a community of three persons – Father, Son and Spirit – who exist in such close harmony that they form a single being.

The essence of their harmony, the quality that binds them together into one is love. The Bible declares that God is love not only because he loves us, but first and foremost because love is central to his being.

It was that love that compelled him to create someone outside of himself, another being that he could draw into his community, an object on whom he could pour the overflow of his love. We humans are that object. God created the universe and the earth to serve as a habitation for us, a place where he could meet with us and commune with us.

Where, you may be asking, does the Bible say that? The Bible says that loud and clear in the order of God’s creative acts. Those acts are recorded in Genesis 1. Let’s go there.

Notice that each creative act starts with a divine declaration:

Verse 3: *“Let there be light.”*

Verse 6: *“Let there be a vault between the waters to separate the water from water.”*

Verse 9: *“Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.”*

Verse 11: *“Let the land produce vegetation.”*

Verse 14: *“Let there be lights in the vault.”*

Verse 20: *“Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth.”*

Verse 24: *“Let the land produce living creatures.”*

Now listen to verse 26 and notice the difference.

*“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”*

Not only has God arrived at his final act of creation; he goes about it differently. Rather than another declaration, the persons of the Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit – communicate their intention to make a creature in their own image who, while he was a part of the created order, stood above it.

I’ll talk more about that in a minute. For now I want you to see how the creation of humans was not an afterthought of creation, but its goal and culmination. Everything that was created before humans was in preparation for humans.

Beginning with the writer or Psalm 8, the sheer size of the universe has led a lot of people to scratch their heads and question the idea that the universe was created specifically for us. Its enormity is often used to support the Secular Story. Who on earth do we think we are when we say that this vast array of galaxies, stars and planets was created for us? How ridiculous is that?

As scientists are learning more and more about the conditions needed to support human life, though, the idea that the heavens and the earth exist for us is becoming less and less ridiculous. Scientists have identified more than 200 finely tuned conditions that need to exist for human life to exist on this planet.

Earlier this week I posted a video on my Facebook site that presents some of that evidence. I’d encourage you to check it out.

So, HIStory starts off with God’s act of creation, which tells us that we were not an accident. Rather, we were intended; we are wanted.

**The next element in Act 1 of HIStory is God’s gift of stewardship. Not only were we intended, we are also important.**

When we read the first chapters of the Bible, we read it in contrast to the Secular Story, which tells us that we are accidental beings and as a result we have no purpose besides the purpose we create for ourselves.

When the Hebrew people first read Genesis 1 and 2, they read these chapters in contrast to a different story. Enuma Elish was the BIG story of the Babylonian people. It spread throughout the Middle East and would have been the BIG story of land when Israel arrived in Canaan from Egypt.

Enuma Elish is the story of many gods. One of those gods was an enormous goddess named Tiamat. At one point in the story some lesser gods that she had created and that lived insider her body rebelled and killed her from the inside. After escaping her body, they proceeded to butcher her by cutting her in half. With half of her body they fashioned the heavens. With the other half they formed the earth.

The gods who were loyal to Tiamat were then forced to serve the other gods; but they were very unhappy and were eventually freed from their service when one of them slayed the chief god and used his blood to create mankind in order to be the slaves of the gods. It would be their job to build shrines and keep the gods happy through offerings of food.

In the Secular Story we have no purpose other than the purpose we conjure up for ourselves. In the Babylonian story our purpose is to keep the gods happy.

In contrast to both of these stories, what does the Bible say? We’ve already started reading what the Bible says. Let’s read it again: Genesis 1:26-28.

*Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”*

*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

*God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

Without even getting into the details, how do these verses portray us? Do they portray us as meaningless accidents? Do they portray us as slaves to the gods? No, they portray us as partners of the Creator.

Verse 27 tells us that God made us in his image. There’s a lot of debate over what that means. I think there’s truth in more than one side of that debate; but one idea that has caught my attention is that being created in God’s image means that we are his representatives here on earth.

In ancient times, kings would erect large statues of themselves in remote parts of their kingdoms in order to remind people who was in charge. Periodically people would have to bow down to those statues to show their loyalty to the king.

That statue was the king’s image; and to refuse to bow down to it was considered an act of rebellion. That’s exactly what happens in the book of Daniel in the story of Shadrack, Meshach and Abednigo. If you don’t know the story, read Daniel 3.

When the Bible tells us that we are God’s image, guess what. We are those statues. No, we’re not statues made of stone; we’re animated images of God, his representatives in the remotest corners of the earth. That’s why God told the first humans to spread out and fill the earth, so that no corner of creation is left without a representative of the divine.

Our ability to function as God’s image has been seriously compromised by our distrust and disobedience of God. The lust and the greed that has taken up residence in us compels us to exploit and pollute creation, rather than use and care for it.

But the image of God in mankind was restored without compromise in Jesus Christ. Colossians 1 tells us that *The Son* (i.e. Jesus Christ) *is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn* (or head) *of all creation*. In other words, he did and is doing what we have failed to do. He represented God perfectly in creation.

Now, when you and I are united with Christ, when we function in step with him, our ability to represent God is restored. When we live by obedient faith in him, we become capable of doing what we were supposed to do in the first place. As Christ frees us from lust and greed, we become faithful stewards of creation.

These days we hear a lot about stewardship of the environment and of nature. In principle, I think that’s a good thing. I also wish that more Christians were at the head of the movement, rather than the laggards we often are.

When I hear the word stewardship being used in a secular context, a pile of questions rush into my mind. A steward is someone who is put in charge of another person’s property. So, whose property are we in charge of?

I also wonder if the people who are using the word know where the idea came from. It may not be a uniquely Christian or biblical idea; but in our part of the world it most certainly has Christian roots.

In fact, unless you assume a Creator, the idea of stewardship becomes pointless. If there is no Creator to whom we must answer, why should we take care of nature? Why should we preserve the earth for our children? Why should the human race survive? Maybe the earth would be better off without us.

Enough ranting. The point I want to make is that God appointed us to be his representatives in creation. By doing that, he put us in a place of genuine importance.

**Let’s move on to the third element of HIStory’s first Act: the promise of life. Not only were we intended; not only are we important; HIStory tells us that we are invaluable.**

This past week the price of gold was over $1700/ounce, while the price of iron was under $60/tonne. With 35274 ounces in each tonne, the price difference is vast.

So, why is gold so much more expensive than iron, when iron gets used so much more? Almost every metal product we use has some iron in it, while gold mostly gets used for things like jewelry and other stuff that isn’t exactly necessary. Now a day it doesn’t even get used in currency.

I’m always a bit taken aback at the prices people are willing to pay for things that are made of gold; but I understand that one reason is that gold is virtually imperishable. While iron may be more useful because of its strength and hardness, it oxidizes and rusts when its exposed to humidity. In contrast, gold doesn’t react with anything. It’s completely stable.

We humans are not exactly stable beings; and from an earthly perspective neither are we imperishable. We are here for a moment; and then we are gone. Psalm 91 compares us to grass: *They are like the new grass of the morning. In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.*

At the same time, the BIG story of Bible makes it clear that we were made to live forever in fellowship with God. Let’s read Genesis 2:7, 8 and 9.

*… the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.   
  
Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

First, I want you to notice that the Creator did something for the first human that he didn’t do for any other creature: *the LORD God … breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.* What’s the significance of that? It may be that God imparted to humankind his own quality of life, which is an everlasting life.

Second, I want you to notice that God planted two trees in the garden. We pay a lot of attention to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; but we don’t pay a lot of attention to the tree of life. What was its purpose?

If you read the last two chapters of the Bible, you will know that the tree of life shows up there as well. Revelation 22:2 tells us that its leaves are for the healing of the nations. In both Genesis 2 and Revelation 22, the tree of life stands in the presence of God as a symbol of the life-giving and healing nature of God’s presence.

As long as they had access to the tree of life which stood for the presence of God, Adam and Eve were free from the curse of disease and death; but the moment they were barred from the tree of life, which happens at the end of Genesis 3, they were subject to disease and death. The tree of life in the middle of the garden represented God’s life-giving and healing presence and stood as a promise of everlasting life.

By giving us the promise of everlasting life, God bestowed on us infinite value. That’s the truth behind Jesus’ words in Mark 8:36, *“What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?**Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”* That’s a rhetorical question whose obvious answer is nothing. Nothing on earth, not even a pile of gold, comes close to the value of a human soul.

You and I are under the curse of death because, like our first parents, we have all broken trust with God and have been barred from his personal presence. God cannot tolerate anything or anyone in his presence that is corrupted by sin.

At the climax of HIStory, though, God provided a new tree of life: the cross of Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus Christ bore the penalty for our distrust and disobedience. He was separated from the Father and tasted hell for us. Now, when we come to the cross by faith, when we confess our sinfulness, God graciously forgives and renews his promise of eternal life.

1 Peter 2:24 brings all of these ideas together: *He himself* (i.e. Jesus Christ) *bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

Yes, we still get sick and die; but death no longer has the last word. Rather than a termination, for the believer death is a transition from this diseased world into God’s life-giving presence. **PP -** In the words of Timothy Keller, “All death can now do for Christians is make their lives infinitely better.”

God’s act of creation tells us that we were intended. God’s gift of stewardship tells us that we are genuinely important to him. God’s promise of eternal life tells us that we are invaluable. **Finally, God’s call to trust tells us that we are indetermined.**

You won’t actually find the word indetermined in the dictionary; but I needed a word that starts with the letter “i" so I made it up. The word you’ll find in the dictionary is undetermined. Something that’s undetermined is not decided beforehand.

Based on the laws of nature, a case can be made that everything that happens in the material universe is predetermined and has been decided beforehand. Some would even say that our individual choices are predetermined and that everything we do has been decided beforehand either by the laws of nature or by God himself.

Now, it’s true that, in the Bible, there’s a tension between God’s sovereignty and foreknowledge and our freedom and responsibility; but the fact remains that both sides of the tension are biblical truths; and whatever we do to resolve that tension we dare not sacrifice either truth.

If we sacrifice God’s sovereignty and foreknowledge, we make God out to be something less than God and we become victims of chance and circumstance. If we sacrifice human freedom and responsibility, we become robots and HIStory becomes a charade.

In Genesis 2:17, when God brought our first father to the tree of the knowledge and said, “*You must not eat from it, for when you eat from it you will certainly die*,” God was not restricting Adam’s freedom. No, God was giving Adam a genuine choice, either to trust God and obey his Word or to trust his own intuition and obey his own instincts.

In a universe that is predetermined by the laws that the Creator put in place, the outcome of that choice was undetermined. Would he choose to trust or not? God knew what Adam would choose, but he didn’t interfere.

God knows what you and I are going to choose when we are confronted with the same choice; and by his Spirit he may influence our choice; but he doesn’t make our choice. If the journey to faith is 100 steps, God may take 99 of those steps; but he will always leave the last step to us. Will we put our hands in his?

The choice to trust God determines everything else I’ve talked about this morning. It determines whether or not we see ourselves as accidental or intended, wanted or unwanted; and that determines whether we move through life with or without purpose.

The choice to trust God determines our ability to function effectively as God’s image in creation. Until we trust God’s promises and obey his Word, our efforts to be stewards of creation will be tainted by lust and greed. We’ll do hypocritical things like fly all over the world in personal jets while we protest the extraction of oil from the ground.

Last but certainly not least, our choice to trust God determines whether or not we live in unbroken fellowship with him and realize the promise of eternal life. It is by God’s grace that we are saved *through faith*.

**CONCLUSION**

I can’t imagine what it’s like to be an unwanted child because I was wanted from the moment of my conception. My mother told my father that I was on the way while the two of them were out for a drive. When my father heard the news, he pulled the station wagon over to the side of the road and the two of them thanked God for me and dedicated me to him.

Not only was I wanted, I was also important to my parents. As I grew up I was given tasks and responsibilities in my family. My parents or any one of my siblings could have fulfilled those tasks as well or better than I ever did; but that didn’t matter. I needed to make a contribution to the household; and that told me that I was important.

Something else my parents did was value me. They didn’t just want me around for the work I could do; they wanted me around for who I was; and they communicated that by taking care of me, by protecting my health and nurturing my life.

My parents clearly communicated to me that I was intended, important and invaluable to them; but there were times when I didn’t feel wanted, important or valued. Maybe my parents said or did something that hurt my feelings; and my feelings told me that I was just an afterthought, in the way, disposable child.

At those moments, I had a choice to make: Would I go with my feelings or with the facts? Would I trust my feelings and begin to doubt my parents? Or would I trust their words and actions over many years and believe that they really loved me?

The same is true in our relationship with God. His Word and actions are clear. I am wanted by him. You are important to him. We are invaluable. God demonstrated his remarkable love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Now, there will be times when we don’t feel wanted, important or valued. At those times, we have a choice to make: Are we going to go with facts or feelings? That choice determines everything; but it’s a choice that you and I have to make; God won’t make it for us.