

## Our Struggle with Fate

Sixth sermon in my series, "The Struggles of a Yoked Life"

Genesis 1:1-5

Sunday, August 30, 2020

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Before we begin, I have a little quiz for you: What is the beginning of the end? The end of time and space? The beginning of eternity? And the end of every race?

We spent the last four weeks in a whirlwind study of the life of Joseph. Over the course of that study, we saw how Joseph was betrayed by his ten brothers, sold into slavery, and unjustly thrown into jail. When he was finally reunited with his brothers, he said, in effect, "Don't worry about all the evil things you did to me; they were all part of the plan of God!"

I asked the question, "What kind of a God would put Joseph through all that pain and misery? What kind of God would seemingly inspire ten siblings to perform such an evil act as selling their brother into slavery? Couldn't God have found a less evil way to accomplish his purposes? Or maybe it was just fate. But who controls fate, if not God?"

It's easy to dwell on the end of the Joseph story where everything turns out for the best. In doing so, we blow off the agonies Joseph experienced as he was betrayed, enslaved, and imprisoned. We must remember that *Joseph lived those agonies*. And as Joseph wasted away forgotten in prison, he had no way of knowing if he would ever again see the light of day.

I think Joseph's story brings us face to face with one of the greatest struggles of the yoked life: **our struggle with fate**. Does God cause evil in order to bring about good?

To help us in our struggle, I'd like to draw your attention to a familiar—and rather controversial—passage in Genesis 1

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

<sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup> God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

This passage and the verses which follow have sparked a lively debate between Creation and Evolution. Did God create the world in six literal 24-hour days? Science says no, but what are you going to believe: science? Or the Bible? And as our children go back to school, they may become embroiled in the debate. I believe, however, that that debate has clouded a far more profound truth that is usually overlooked, even though it's as plain as the nose on your face. Fortunately, British author Edwin Abbott can shed some light on that profound truth.

In 1884, Edwin Abbott published a fascinating book entitled, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. It was written as a short novel satirizing the social hierarchy of the Victorian culture in his day.

The story is about a two-dimensional world known as Flatland which is occupied by simple geometric figures of various sizes. Because Flatland is a two-dimensional world, it is superior to Lineland which is a one-dimensional world inhabited by "lustrous points." Nonetheless, at one point—now there's a good pun—the square attempts to convince the Lineland's ignorant monarch that there is another world with a second dimension; however, the Square is unsuccessful in convincing the linear monarch.

The tables are turned for the Square when, back in Flatland, he is visited by a three-dimensional Sphere. The Square cannot comprehend a third-dimensional being until he is taken to the three-dimensional world known as Spaceland.

Once the Square realizes that there is a third dimension beyond his own two-dimensional world, he concludes that the Sphere must be some sort of god and is therefore worthy of worship.

The original intent of the novel is to criticize the British monarchy for their inability to see beyond their own limited perceptions. However, in the seven score years since it was first published, *Flatland* has captured the imagination of mathematicians, philosophers and physicists, among others, because it raises the possibility that there could be another dimension beyond our three-dimensional world.

Indeed, after the Square's mind is opened to new dimensions, he tries to convince the Sphere of the theoretical possibility of the existence of a fourth spatial dimension and perhaps even more beyond the four.

And that brings us back to Genesis 1. It's easy to get tangled up in the debate about Creation versus evolution but we fail to see the more important fact of the story...

...and that is the fact that when God created the world and all that is therein, **God also created time.**

Much of how we mark time is determined by something occurring in the created order. One way to demonstrate this is to take your pulse: the steady rhythm of blood through our veins marks time.

On a much larger scale, the length of our year is based on how long it takes earth to revolve around the sun: 365.26 Earth days. A day on earth is determined by how long it takes our planet to make one revolution on its axis: 23.93 hours. That's rather fast when compared to other planets in our solar system.

Consider the planet Venus: it takes Venus 224.7 Earth days to revolve around the sun. In comparison, it takes Venus 243 Earth days to complete one rotation on its axis. In other words, a day on Venus is longer than a year.

Saturn has the shortest day of any planet in our solar system; one day on Saturn takes 10.2 Earth hours. However, a year on Saturn takes 29.46 Earth years.

What that tells us is that time is relative to creation and if the creation was formed by God, then in the process, **God also created time.**

Genesis 1 bears this out: the first creative work of God was to create light and separate the light from the darkness, thereby creating Day and Night, the first day. In other words, the very first thing God created was time since time is related to the created order.

Now consider the fact that if I create something, then I am greater than what I formed.

When I was in high school, I took a class in woodworking and made a magazine rack: I can say with certainty that I am greater than the magazine rack; I transcend my magazine rack.

The same holds true for God: God created me; God is greater than me. God created the world; God is greater than the world. God created the universe; God is greater than the universe.

And God created time; therefore God is greater than time. **God transcends time.** God stands above time. We humans tend to think of time in linear terms, as though Eternity is simply a series of days and weeks and years endlessly strung together. But that would suggest that God is controlled by time, rather than the other way around.

Einstein's Theory of Relativity tells us that time is relative to motion; the faster something moves; the more time is compressed. Let's say you were to fly west out of Chicago at noon. Your plan is to fly nonstop around the globe in 23 hours, landing back to Chicago. That would mean that you would've compressed time and arrived in Chicago a full hour before you would've left on your trip. Time is relative to motion.

The Bible reveals God and Jesus as Light. And when you think of Light and time and its relativity to motion, then you think of the speed of light.

If God is Light and can travel (as it were) at the speed of light, then for God, time is infinitely compressed. That's just another way of saying that God transcends time. Or, using our *Flatland* analogy, we might say that God lives in a four-dimensional world where time is the fourth dimension.

If you're having difficulty wrapping your three-dimensional brain around that, you're in good company; the Square couldn't wrap his two-dimensional brain around the third dimension of space.

What this suggests is that God does not live in a lineal timeline; rather, God lives in an Eternal Now. In his song, "Breathe In, Breathe Out, Move On" Jimmy Buffett sings a song set in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina:

I bought a cheap watch from a crazy man  
Floating down canal  
It doesn't use numbers or moving hands  
It always just says Now<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From "Breathe In, Breathe Out, Move On"

Maybe eternity is not a matter of “being there ten thousand years” as much as it’s a matter of entering into God’s Eternal Now.

If God lives in God’s own Eternal Now, then that just might resolve our struggle with fate. If God transcends time, then God is not restricted by time. God, it would seem, is able to move back and forth across the timeline of history.

That means that God was present with Joseph as he dreamt of greatness. But at the same time, God was present with Joseph when he was betrayed, enslaved, and imprisoned. And at the same time, God was present with Joseph as he was elevated to Vice Pharaoh over Egypt’s food storage and distribution program. It all happened simultaneously as it were in God’s own eternal Now.

But everyone else—the ten brothers, Potiphar and his wife, the baker and the wine steward—were all confined to time. Consequently, they were responsible for their actions. Joseph’s ten brothers were not pawns in some evil plan of God; they were acting out of their own jealousy for their brother. In other words, God’s transcendence over time does not negate or contradict human free will. And God doesn’t merely see the future; God lives in the future while God lives in both the present and the past. God transcends time.

Some of you are studying the book of Hebrews in Bill Joseph’s Sunday School class. One of the frequently quoted verses from that book is Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.” If God is living in God’s own Eternal Now, then it’s no wonder that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow: they are all the same to God. They are all parts of God’s Eternal Now.

Think of it: If God transcends time, then for God there is an entire eternity in between each and every second that ticks on our watch. That’s how God is able to hear our individual prayers. God is able to be not only *everywhere* present, but also *every time* present.

And one day we will be freed from the constraints of time. We call that *eternity*. Revelation 21:23 describes eternity this way:

And the city has no need for the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Just a few verses later in Revelation 22:5 we discover that:

There will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Why are the sun and moon important to us? Because they mark time. What do the end of the sun and the end of the moon signify? That time itself will be no more and we will live in God’s Eternal Now.

And since God lives in his Eternal Now, that means that the work of Christ on the cross is still happening now and it is just as able to save us today as it was to cover the sins of those who crucified him two thousand years ago when he prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Through his Son, Jesus Christ, God is able to share his resurrection power with us today in our here and now. Thanks be to God.