

## **Sermon 6: The Bible: Part Three: Unity**

### **OUTLINE**

The central story of the Bible  
The developing plot of the Bible

### **INTRODUCTION**

Marcion was one of the early heretics in Church history. He thought that the God of the OT was different to the God of the NT. He saw the God of the OT as one of law and anger, but the God of the NT as one of love and grace. He took a pair of scissors to the Bible and came up with a Bible that only had a butchered copy of Luke's gospel and 10 of Paul's letters. He could not see the unity of the OT with the NT, he could not see the compatibility of love and wrath, and so he created his own Canon. This instinct to attempt to divide and conquer the word of God is a recurring one and raises its head in various disguises in every generation. It comes in the form of uniformed prejudice from those who have never read the Bible who merely repeat the opinions they have heard, that the bible is just a disparate and jumbled collection of books written by men. The theory has popular versions like in Dan Brown conspiratorial The Da Vinci Code that claims that Constantine forced certain books of the Bible to be accepted and other rejected in order to control the religion that controlled the masses. And it can also come from people with PhDs in the form of what is called redaction criticism and form criticism. The assumption behind these views is that the various authors of the Bible were plagiarists who borrowed everything they said from their contexts and, that what they produced was not the work of the Spirit of God and inspiration but was merely a product of the times they lived in. Redaction criticism comes in very unbelieving forms saying that the gospels for example were not the results of Matthew and Mark and Luke, but rather that there was an editor who collected these gospels in their names. They make all sorts of assumptions about the theological influences upon the editor some even speaking of a Marcionite type influence. The OT had been subjected to endless divisions as some have attempted to find the apparent sources behind the Torah for example. A famous one is the J E D P theory. The theory here is that the Bible is a collection of these four major influences. J represents the Yahwist, E represents the Elohist, D is a lawyer and called the Deuteronomist, and P is priest. As they read through the first five books of the Bible they view it as an edited work from four different sources and concerns. That each of these four sources wrote at different times and with different concerns. They then in turn rewrote the history of Israel with their own biases squeezed in and shaping the narrative. The job of the critic is to discover these imaginary sources and to separate them from each other.

Sadly each of these views is fixated on the human authors and attempting to give an exclusively natural explanation for the Bible seeking to make it like any other book. We do not deny that the Bible is the work of men, it is 100% the work of men and 100% the work of God. It is inspired by God, preserved from error, and is not a work of deceit or manipulation. And one of the ways Christians can see the divine authorship of the Bible is its unity. The Bible tells a single story revealing a single author. In short the story is about a God of grace saving a sinful people for Himself by the work of His Son.

Today I want to give a glimpse of this unity. We will do it in two stages. We will look at those verses that tell us what unites the story of the Bible, and then secondly we will look at examples of how this unity is demonstrated.

## **The central story of the Bible**

Several portions of the Bible point us to the central unifying theme of Scripture. John 5:39-40, 'You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,<sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.' Here Jesus is speaking to the Jews talking about how the Father witnesses to Jesus being who He says He is. Then he drops this revealing rebuke. The Jews search the Bible, and the Bible Jesus tells us is all about Jesus Himself. He is the common thread, the unifying theme, the central feature. Luke 24:43-47, 'Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.' Here Jesus is giving the first Bible study to the disciples after He has resurrected. This Bible study shows how every part of the Bible tells the single story of how Jesus was to die to save His people. Revelation 19:10, 'Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Here John is tempted to worship an angel and is rebuked, and the rebuke is a reminder that the story is all about Jesus and that He alone deserves our worship. The angel explains it by saying that the spirit/central aspect of prophecy, its essential essence is a testimony about the Saviour God will provide. We need to appreciate that there is a Spirit taught perspective. It is the Spirit who opens our eyes to see this unifying aspect of the Bible. Paul when comparing the OT and the NT writes, 2 Cor. 3:14-16, 'But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.<sup>15</sup> Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.<sup>16</sup> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.' Do you want to see this unifying theme in Scripture? Only those who have the Spirit can. Do you wonder why others cannot see what you see? Without the Spirit they cannot.

## **The developing plot of the Bible**

There are many themes that run from Genesis to Revelation showing the development of a single story as it moves towards its climax. I will talk in particular about temple, fellowship and worship. I am going to try and take several of them and interweave them to make a single strand. God is separated from sinners because of our sin. He cannot live in covenant with those who are criminals, yet we see that he has makes a house with them. The OT tabernacle is one of several progressive steps towards God and man being reconciled in heaven one day. If we start at the beginning, we see God and man having fellowship and friendship together in the garden. You can call this a temple garden. There are a number of things that agree between the garden and the temple. The garden and the temple were the place where God met with His people. In Gen. 2:15 we are told that Adam was to work and keep the garden. This is the same language describing the priest's duties in the tabernacle, Num. 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6. Just as the priests were entrusted to keep out all uncleanness and unlawful people from the various parts of the tabernacle, so Adam was entrusted to keep out all uncleanness from the Garden. When the unclean serpent came and slandered God, Adam was to act to cleanse the holy ground and put the guilty to death, but failed. Adam was driven from the garden and God's presence was guarded by cherubim, likewise God's presence in the tabernacle is guarded by cherubim. Solomon's temple had garden themes uniting palm trees, cherubim and flowers, (1 Kings 6:18, 29). And both Eden's and the temple entrance were on the East side.

They had a home together and are in perfect harmony. But then sin comes in and man is sent out of the garden no longer welcome in God's paradise to dwell together with him in friendship. But that is not the end of the story God loves us and seeks our salvation so he makes a way for man to have a relationship with him through the death of a sacrifice removing our guilt. And so we see the Patriarchs worshipping God through the sacrifices that they offer, yet God is only a visitor who does not dwell with them. However as we move on in the history of Israel we see a change, God calls Moses and delivers Israel and gives instruction for a house for his presence to abide, that he might always be with his people. The house is there yet there is a rift between people and God and they are only able to approach him through the priesthood, and not directly. So there is proximity but also distance. When Israel comes into the promised land we see that Solomon is called to build a better permanent and more glorious house, which suits the better conditions of being pilgrims to dwelling in the promised land. So although the Temple is glorious the distance between worshipper and God is still very real. But God has greater plans still, he intends to draw nearer to his people still. And we see a remarkable thing in the birth of Jesus Christ. We see God becoming man, and a literal fulfilment of the name Emmanuel which means God with us. And in John 1:14 we have these words, 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us', those words should literally read, 'the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us.' The tabernacle was the place that the law was preserved, Jesus is now the person that fulfils all the law. It was the place of revelation but Jesus is God's greatest word to man. It was the place of relationship and meeting, but we now more profoundly meet and have fellowship with God in union with Christ partaking of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). It was the place of forgiveness of sin by the sacrifices, but Jesus is now the lamb of God. It was the place of priest's ministering, but He is the greatest priest who has offered the greatest sacrifice. It was the place of worship, but we now worship in Spirit and in truth in Christ. 'In order to meet with God, to talk with Him, and to worship Him, we no longer come to a building or a tent or a structure made with human hands. We come to Jesus!'<sup>1</sup>

As the body of Christ we are also the temple with Christ as the cornerstone, the place where God's glory dwells Eph. 2:21-22, 'Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.' There is no longer a literal temple but only the organism of an expanding people (Eph. 4:16), Peter calls us 'living stones' (1 Peter 2:5). We are now the temple, this idea is significantly stated in 2 Cor 6:16, 'What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'

The Holy Spirit came down upon the Church in Pentecost, like the Glory of God fell on Solomon's Temple, and we as the Church, individually and collectively, are a temple of God. The very presence of God, by the third person of the Trinity dwells within us. The OT Jew could not go into the Holy of Holies, we do. The OT Jew could not live in the presence of God for his sins. Our sins have been cleansed by the better sacrifice of Christ, and now we live in the presence of God, all of our lives being Holy Ground, like the Burning Bush.

And what can be better than that you might think? Well it does get better, and we see in the closing chapters of the Bible the future Garden of Eden, and paradise that awaits us, it is a complete restoration of the Garden of Eden and more. All sin will be abolished, every

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<sup>1</sup> Kingdom Come, p18.

enemy crushed, and we will be able to walk with God in perfect harmony and friendship once again, but forever, never to be separated again.

Revelation 22:1-5, 'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb<sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.<sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.<sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.<sup>5</sup> And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.' The bible begins with a garden where God dwells with His people, and it ends with a better Garden where we are inseparably forever with God. So what starts as a garden, becomes a land, gets concentrated as a temple, exists as a church, will culminate in the Garden-temple-city-kingdom that is spoken of in these closing chapters of the bible. As we come to the end of the story and God wants to tell us about what is coming He draws on the pictures of the Garden of Eden, the Temple, and the kingdom.

We are taken to the main street of the New Jerusalem, this city-temple-garden-mountain and we see a river. The River. We know that the Garden of Eden was abundantly supplied with water. Gen. 2:10 talks about a single river that divides into four to water the Garden. When there was no rain and all other things were watered by a mist, Eden was well watered. The place where God would dwell with man had a river in it providing all man's needs. So here in the new creation we see a river. It is the river of the water of life. It is clear, a point we take for granted in our day of water filtration. And it flows directly from God's throne. This river featured largely in prophecy when God was speaking about future grace. In Ezek. Temple in Ezek. 47:1-9 a river runs from the temple, this is that river. This is the river of Zech. 14:8 that flows from Jerusalem. This is the river of Joel 3:18 when God restores Israel's fortunes. All those promises were looking forward to Garden of Eden fruitfulness and peace, and here they are fulfilled.

As we walk with our tour guide along the river from its source we see what grows on its banks. The tree of life. Not just in one place but it has diversified and grows on both sides of the river and yields 12 kinds of fruit. The number 12 we know is for the people of God, indicating the food for the people of God. The fruit is not annual but monthly. There will always be fruit on the tree. And the leaves we are told heal the nations. The tree we know also comes from the Garden. Adam probably had not yet eaten of its fruit before he had sinned, and was removed from the Garden before he did 3:22-24. The river and the tree speak of paradise regained which had been lost but in greater proportions to what we lost in Adam. We are seeing here a picture of the promised rest represented by the original Sabbath day realised in the New Creation.

Whenever we think of Eden we can't help but think of the curse, but here we are told explicitly, there will be no more curse. The world which was subjected to futility as it shared in our corruption will be renewed. Relationships which had been ruined by sin will be freed. The presence of satan as our prison warden over. Our alienation from our environment, finished. No more moth and rust destroying, no more ageing, no more sickness, no more death, no birth defects, no stillborn children, no dentists or hospitals, no glasses or braces, no corrupt nature drawing us away from God to sin, no more inward struggle with sin. V3 tells us that then we will be free to worship. Can you imagine it? Your mind will not wander, the truth will never be familiar and boring, your emotions will be firing on all cylinders, there will be no shame that makes you hang your head and hang back, you will

have a perfect voice, all your bad theology will be replaced with truth, and all your doubts and questions which breed reserve will be swallowed up in informed abandon. God will be our portion, our treasure, our love. No running from Him and hiding making fig leaves to hide our shame, we will be perfected by grace and shameless in His presence.

The idea of the New Jerusalem being a garden temple is reinforced by that fact that we will be perpetual worshippers not sinners; it is seen in the fact that we will be in God's presence 'face to face' as it were. Like the high priest we will have the name of God on our foreheads.

There is one last idea I would like to place before you that picks up on themes from earlier in the bible, 'and they will reign forever and ever.' Go back to the garden and you will find Adam. He was given dominion over God's creation and commanded to reign and subdue it as God's vice-regent, Gen. 1:28. Adam sinned and lost his authority and was an exiled king. We all fell in him and lost our inheritance rights to the earth and were placed under satan's power as a type of prison warden. But God brought the Israelites into Egypt and established a new kingship. It was however imperfect. And the shadow kings who hearkened back to Eden and pointed forward to someone greater repeated the sins of Adam and suffered the same fate as Adam, they were deposed and exiled. But Christ the true King comes and in His ministry He reveals to us the Kingdom. His kingdom will be without demons, sickness, death, nature will comply with His will, etc. By His death and resurrection He inaugurated that kingdom but has not yet consummated it. We live now in the already but not yet when Jesus is ruling but is waiting for all enemies to be put under His feet. But one day when Jesus returns Christ will consummate the kingdom putting all things under His feet. The church militant walks as Christ walked in His incarnation, as humble royalty. We have authority but it is resisted. Those saints who have died we see in Rev. 20:4 rule with Christ in the intermediate state where running parallel to the church persecuted in the tribulation on earth some have already participated in the first resurrection by going to be with Christ in the intermediate state. But all that will come to an end and in the new creation we will see a restoration of Adam's dominion in Christ's full dominion and we will be co-regents with Him sharing not only in His riches but rule. Man's original dignity and destiny will be fully realised.

This is a tiny scarping of the rich and deep story of how God saves a sinful people through His Son. Every part of the story of the Bible plays an important part in its unfolding and development. All the major events and characters of the Bible make up either a part of its creation, alienation, preparation, restoration, propagation or consummation. Give me any part of the Bible and it will point out how it fits in this broader narrative. This is no greater story of love, no greater display of grace, no more humble, or brave, or holy, or generous demonstration. This story of the Bible is a story intended to put on display the glory of God and there is no one like our God. As you think about reasons why you believe, remember the Bible and in particular the unity of the Bible, the overarching and most spectacular story ever told.