

Proper 22

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October 5, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Our Lord Jesus, you have endured the doubts and foolish questions of every generation. Forgive us for trying to be judge over you, and grant us the confident faith to acknowledge you as Lord. Amen.

Genesis 2:18-24

{18} Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." {19} So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. {20} The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. {21} So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. {22} And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. {23} Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." {24} Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

18. the man: In Hebrew the word for "man" is *adam*, which is associated with *adamah*, red earth, in Genesis 2:7. The "man" who was created was not specifically male, but contained the potential for both male and female. To convey the earthy origin and gender ambiguity *adam* could be translated as "earthling."

it is not good that the man should be alone: "Solitude 'is not good'; ;man is created for sociability." See Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 for the benefits of two as opposed to one.

a helper as his partner: The Hebrew "means literally 'alongside him,' i.e., 'corresponding to him.'"

19: Yahweh looks first to the animals and birds for a companion for the earthling. They have been created for his use, but they are not suitable for the companionship the earthling needs.

19-20: The earthling names the creatures. "God makes the animals...and leads them to the man, and the man takes them and incorporates them into his life. That is what the remarkable passage about the naming of the animals means.... The animal too is taken from the earth and is incorporated by man into his circle of life as the environment nearest him.... name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command."

21-23: The creation of woman (and man) takes place outside the consciousness of the earthling. The woman is taken out of the earthling, and what is left is the man. Upon waking the man recognizes in the woman his proper companion, and knows that they share flesh and bone.

this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken: This verse is a play on the words for "man" and "woman" in Hebrew: *ish* and *isshah*.

24. a man leaves his father and mother: Actually, marriage in Israel was just the reverse. The woman left her family and joined her husband, and her husband's family.

clings to his wife: This "clinging" "comes from the fact that God took woman from man, that they actually were originally *one* flesh. Therefore they must come together again and thus by destiny they belong to each other..

they become one flesh: Since the man and the woman share common flesh and bone, they

become one flesh when the man "clings" to his wife.

Psalm 8

{1} O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. {2} Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. {3} When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; {4} what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? {5} Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. {6} You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, {7} all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, {8} the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. {9} O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

1. *Sovereign*: The Hebrew word is *Adonai*, a word used both of God and humans to indicate their authority. The use of this title emphasizes that Yahweh is the Lord of creation, the Ruler of the created order, the Sovereign of heaven and earth and *everything* in them.

2: There is nothing else in the Bible like this verse. It seems to mean that God is so powerful that the inarticulate sounds of a baby used by God can defeat foes and silence enemies. In other words, Yahweh needs nothing from human beings to prevail, and yet in verse 4, he is known to be mindful and caring toward them.

3: The wonder of the heavens and the heavenly bodies overwhelm the psalmist when he considers how insignificant human beings are in comparison.

4. *what are human beings that you are mindful of them*: The question is not answered directly, but the place of humankind in the creation is described. See Psalm 144:3-4 for another view: "They are like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow."

5. *you have made them little lower than God*: The Hebrew word for "God" is *elohim*, the plural form of the Semitic *el*, the generic word for God. Some would translate it "angels" here, perhaps in keeping with the translation in Hebrews 2:7. Human beings were created in the "image" and "likeness" of God and thus are only little lower than God.

crowned them with glory and honor: These words convey both the intention of God and the irony of the tragic reality of humanity.

6-8: Genesis 1:26-30 is in the background. The dominion given to mortals is to act as Yahweh's agent on behalf of the creation. Humans are little lower than God, and are loved and honored by him. The creation is little lower than humans, and they should act toward it as Yahweh acts toward them. That is, they may use it and its creatures, but they should not abuse it.

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

{1} Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, {2} but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. {3} He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, {4} having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.... {2:5} Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. {6} But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? {7} You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, {8} subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, {9} but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. {10} It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. {11} For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, {12} saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

The language and imagery of Hebrews is dense and unfamiliar in its use of Jewish wisdom language and first century Hellenistic thought forms. The notes are a very limited look at the nature and character of the thought of the book. The book is worth a full-scale study by any preacher who intends to help his/her congregation understand its message.

1. *many and various ways*: "Although the use of the two initial adverbs is designed for rhetorical effect, they are not simply synonyms. The first (polumerîj [*polymeros*]) suggests that God's speech was disjointed, coming in multiple segments or portions. The second (polutropîj [*polytropos*]) suggests the formal diversity of God's word."

3. *he is the reflection of God's glory*: See 1 Corinthians 11:7: "a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man."

2. *in these last days*: Literally, "at the end of these days." "The phrase is derived from a scriptural expression for the future, which came to be used in an eschatological sense."

he is the reflection of God's glory: See John 1:14.

a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things: "In Hebrews, Christ's status as heir is manifested in his exaltation to the 'right hand' (vs. 3d), a transcendent position that guarantees his brethren their inheritance and a share in 'a heavenly calling.'"

through whom he also created the worlds: This statement reflects the Christian wisdom tradition found in John 1:3, 10; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16.

3. *the reflection of God's glory*: More wisdom language. See Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 where Wisdom is said to be an "επαύγασμα [*apaugasma* = 'reflection, radiance'] of the glory of the Almighty.... The image...serves...to affirm the intimate relationship between the Father and the pre-existent Son, through whom redemption is effected."

5: In Psalm 8:6 dominion is given to human beings.

6. *someone has testified somewhere*: The quotation is from Psalm 8:4. This is the beginning of a discussion which extends to verse 9.

9. *Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels*: That is, "Jesus, who for a little while was made human."

crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death...taste death for everyone: The image of crowned with glory and honor is from Psalm 8: 5. That Jesus was glorified because he suffered death for everyone. "What this text reveals about the Son and his exalted status is that such status is dependent upon what happens to Jesus as a human being, in the pre-eminently human event of his death."

10-12: Verses 10-18 speak of "High-Priestly Perfection through Suffering." "...the author uses the incarnation myth to stress the solidarity of the Son with his brothers and sisters and to emphasize the qualities that characterize Jesus as the heavenly High Priest.... What began and...concludes with a comparison of Christ and the angels has led to a subtle meditation on the basis of Christology and soteriology, laying the groundwork for the exposition of Christ's status as High Priest."

10. *bringing many children to glory*: "God's sons and daughters have 'glory' (dòxan [*doxan*]) as their destiny, the glory that the Son has had from all eternity (1:3) and with which he was crowned at his exaltation (2:7-9). That glory then is a heavenly and eschatological condition... and it contrasts sharply with the circumstance of suffering and death by which it is achieved."

11. *all have one Father*: "God's salvific act is directed at all human beings with whom Christ is united by his humanity."

12. *saying, "I will proclaim...I will praise you."*: Psalm 22:22. The words, which in the Psalm are spoken by the psalmist, are taken here to be spoken by Jesus. See Hebrews 10:5-10 for a similar assignment of words quoted from the Old Testament to Jesus.

Mark 10:2-16

{2} Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" {3} He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" {4} They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a

certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." {5} But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. {6} But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' {7} 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, {8} and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. {9} Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." {10} Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. {11} He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; {12} and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." {13} People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. {14} But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. {15} Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." {16} And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

4. *Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal*: There is no specific legislation permitting divorce. There are a number of references which recognize the existence of divorce and seek to regulate it. Leviticus 21:14 forbids a priest (a son of Aaron) to marry a divorced woman. According to Deuteronomy 22:19, a man who has accused a woman of not being a virgin when he married her may not divorce her if she proves that she was. Deuteronomy 22:29 denies the possibility of divorce to a man who has raped a virgin. All assume the reality of divorce though there is not specific law concerning divorce or what is required. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 concerns remarriage of a divorced wife, which is forbidden (See also Jeremiah 3:1). In Malachi 2:16 the prophet has Yahweh say, "I hate divorce."

5. *Because of your hardness of heart*: "The implication is that the words express a merciful concession for the woman's sake," With such a certificate she would be free to marry again. A woman had no legal standing and few rights. If she were married she would have the legal protection of her husband.

6. *from the beginning of creation*: The connection is being made with the story of creation in Genesis.

God made them male and female: Genesis 1:27

7. *For this reason...*: This reference is to Genesis 2:24.

no longer two but one flesh: "This indicates that marriage is a 'blood' relationship rather than a legal one. And because it is a blood relationship, like the relationship to mother and father (in v. 7) or to one's siblings, marriage cannot be legally dissolved. Moreover, just as it is God alone who determines who one's parents are, so too, it is God who 'joins together' in marriage."

9-12. Jesus forbids divorce for his followers. See also 1 Corinthians 7:10. Matthew's report of what Jesus said permits divorce in the case of unchastely (Matthew 19:9). Paul makes an exception for the case of a Christian spouse whose unbelieving spouse separates from them (divorces); the Christian spouse is then not bound to the marriage (1 Corinthians 7:15).

13-16: "In view here are the proverbial vulnerability and helplessness of children. The picture is one of peasant women, many of whose babies would be dead within their first year, fearfully holding them out for Jesus to touch. Jesus' laying his hands on children to protect them from or clear them of the evil eye (this is the main malignancy from which parents have to protect their children in the Mediterranean) is offered as a model for how to enjoy God's patronage (= entering the kingdom of heaven). The argument is that God's patronage belongs to those ready and willing to be his clients."

Reflection

At the root of our problems in dealing with God is our desire to be in control. We want to set the rules and we want to enforce the rules we set. The difficulty is that we are not in control. God is! So, the first thing we must learn is that very simple fact. The relationships between men and women and the question of divorce are prominent are singled out as examples of our desire to be in control. God created human beings and distinguished two. He then provided what was needed to ensure that the two would desire each other. The union of man and woman was not

intended to be a passing encounter, but a lasting relationship. Human beings, on the other hand, have sought to dissolve the union for various causes.

In response to a question concerning the legitimacy of divorce Jesus' reply was an absolute ban. Already in Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians Paul allows a Christian spouse to marry again if divorced by an unbeliever. While Matthew allows an exception for "unchastity." There is ample reason for permitting divorce in cases of abuse or unchastity, so these exceptions are not dishonorable. Still, though in such cases, and others, divorce provides escape from an intolerable situation, it is still contrary to God's will. If we claim otherwise we seek to set the rules and apply them according to our wishes.

Nevertheless, God is the one who created us, and established the relationships we may enjoy. It is our place to accept the structures and limits God has provided, and to acknowledge that when we create new structures and establish different limits we are, in fact, challenging God's authority over us.

Because God sent Jesus we now have a "high priest" who knows our weaknesses and has accepted our death for our sins. He calls us his brothers and sisters taking upon himself the consequences of our actions.

Hymns

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

88 --E--Oh, Love, How

357 --D--Our Father, by

238 --II--God Has Spoken

156 --II--Look, the Sight

328 --II--All Hail the

287 --G--O Perfect Love

187, 193, 512, 790s/749v

Prayers of the People

In these last days, God of Word and witness, you have spoken to us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus calls us sisters and brothers. Through him, we are your children. Help us to live faithful to you and to one another that the goodness of your grace and power might be made known in all the world. God of grace and glory hear our prayer.

The Church, Christ's body, has lived a divided life. Help us to reach across the gaps of time and custom so that we might touch and be touched. Bring us together again at the table of the Lord. Bless the Canadian Conference of Bishops who meet in annual gathering this next weekend. God of grace and glory hear our prayer.

We thank you for the opportunity to serve one another in daily life. Bless our farmers and business people, all in politics and industry, those in healthcare and education and all those who labour. Bless those of us who can only watch and pray. God of grace and glory hear our prayer.

Or

Presider or deacon

Let us offer prayers to God who took little children in his arms and blessed them.

Deacon or other leader

For believers everywhere, made one in a covenant of fidelity and love.

For all peoples of the earth, children of God and members of the human family.

For the good earth and its fragile resources.

For the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea.

For the married people of our community, and for those who have experienced the pain of divorce.

For all whose lives are marked by sickness and suffering.

For those who have died in Christ and for all the dead.

Lifting our voices with all creation, with the blessed Virgin Mary, Francis, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Living God, who created all things through your Son and spoke to us through his Word, hear our prayers for mercy and crown your people in glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

[1] E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964, p. 16.

[2] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1956, p. 80.

[3] Speiser, *ibid.*, p. 17.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

[5] Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989, p. 37.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 39. See Genesis 49:1; Numbers 24:14; Deuteronomy 4:30; Jeremiah 23:20 for the future. See Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1; Hosea 3:5; Daniel 10:14, for the eschatological sense.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[13] Bruce Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 240.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 243.

[15] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclb9900.txt>

[16] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b2.txt

[17] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>