

Closer to Free
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 & Genesis 2:4- 4:24
July 3, 2011

I. Song – Closer to Free, by the BoDeans

Everybody wants to live How they wanna live
And everybody wants to love Like they wanna love
And everybody wants to be Closer to Free

Everybody wants respect Just a little bit
And everybody needs a chance Once in a while
Everybody wants to be Closer to Free

Everybody one Everybody two Everybody free

Everybody needs to touch You know now and then
And everybody wants a good good friend
Everybody wants to be
Closer to Free

Everybody wants to live
How they want to live
And everybody wants to love
Who they want to love
And everybody wants to be
Closer to Free

- II. As the BoDeans tell us,
“Everybody wants to be closer to free,”
but all too often it is a very childish
freedom that is desired;
a freedom that can result in evil.
- A. A couple weeks ago we took a look at the 1st
Chapter of Genesis and the creation story
that some priests wrote -- where in they
described how God created the heavens and
the earth out of the waters of chaos, a
substance that was inherently free and not
totally controllable, which leads to events
that may not be in our best interest, a.k.a.
evil.
- B. This morning I want to look at the creation
story that some theologians, known as the
Yahwists wrote.
Now even though the early editors of the
Hebrew scriptures put this story second, it
was probably written well before the Priests
wrote their version that we find in the first
chapter.
But you know, it sounds cooler if you start
out you book with “In the beginning...”
- C. Enough background – let’s hear the story.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the YAHWEY God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up--for the YAHWEY God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground;

but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground--

then the YAHWEY God formed a human from the dust of the ground, and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life;

and the human became a living being.

(Note that quite different from the first creation story, here humans are created first, not last; and created even before plant life. Back to the story.)

And the YAHWEY God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there God put humans whom God had formed.

*(Sorry to keep interrupting the story, but please also note that in the rather sexist translations we all have, the word here that is translated as "man" in our Bibles is actually a Hebrew word that is androgynous and female **and male** genders are not created until later; so here I use the word "human" rather than man.*

Back again to the story.)

Out of the ground the YAHWEY God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The YAHWEY God took the human and put it in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

And the YAHWEY God commanded the human, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Then the YAHWEY God said,

"It is not good that the human should be alone; I will make it a helper as its partner."

So out of the ground the YAHWEY God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the human to see what it would call them;

and whatever the human called every living creature, that was its name.

The human gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the human there was not found a helper as its partner.

So the YAHWEY God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human, and it slept; then God took one of its ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that the YAHWEY God had taken from the human God made into a woman and brought her to the man.

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."

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

CHAPTER 3

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the YAHWEY God had made.

He said to the woman,

"Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent,

"We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said,

'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'"

But the serpent said to the woman,

"You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate;

and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked;

and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

They heard the sound of the YAHWEY God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the YAHWEY God among the trees of the garden.

But the YAHWEY God called to the man, and said to him,

"Where are you?"

The man replied,

"I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

God then asked,

"Who told you that you were naked?"

Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

The man said,

"The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."

Then the YAHWEY God said to the woman,

"What is this that you have done?"

The woman said,

"The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

The YAHWEY God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

To the woman he said,
"I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire
shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over
you."

And to the man he said,
"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree about which I
commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is
the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until
you return to the ground, for out of it you were
taken;

you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

The man named his wife Eve, because she was the
mother of all living.

And the YAHWEY God made garments of skins for
the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

Then the YAHWEY God said,

"See, the man has become like one of us, knowing
good and evil;

and now, he might reach out his hand and take also
from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"--

therefore the YAHWEY God sent him forth from the
garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was
taken.

He drove out the man;

and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the

cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

III. I find this to be one of the richest stories in the Bible and the number of ways it has been used and missed used over the millennia are like numbering the stars.

- A. Right away, folks should have realized that man ruling over women was the fallen and undesired state not the paradisiacal state.
- B. But even more profound is that the real sin that is committed in this story is not only the inappropriate use of freedom that alienated the humans from God; but rather, the childlike understanding of freedom and responsibility; the sin of not accepting responsibility for ones freely taken actions.

IV. Let's take a moment to look at the way responsibility is separated from freedom in the story.

- A. To start with, let's note that the serpent was the only one who didn't pass off responsibility onto someone else.
- B. The man surely refused to take responsibility and passed it on to the woman.

- C. The woman refused to take responsibility and passed it onto the serpent.
- D. But oddly, in following this path of passing of responsibility;
the path from man, to woman, to serpent;
like a magic trick our attention is drawn away from the most profound refusal to accept responsibility.
If we were to take this path in the other direction;
from serpent, to woman, to man, we would see that the path does not end there.
In this story, like other middle eastern myths of the time, with an all too human God, we find that God too refuses to accept responsibility.
- E. After all it was God who gave the humans freedom that eventually had to lead right to where it did lead.
- F. You'll notice that none of the other animals, not even the serpent ate from the tree.
What was different between them and the humans?
- G. The difference is that God gave the human the freedom to name his world.
This naming of the world, this creation of language was also the creation of the ability

to give meaning to the world.

The freedom to give meaning to the world was the freedom that allowed the human to be self aware and think, which allowed the human to choose to eat of the fruit of good and evil and begin the road from ignorant amoral beast to the user of the iPad.

H. But did God take responsibility for this creation, for granting this freedom?

No.

Again like a child, God too, in this story mind you, refuses to take responsibility and blames the creation rather than the creator; and that my friends is the beginning of evil. Evil in this story, the punishment for disobeying God, birth pains, having to toil for a living and death, is forced upon us by a God that is too childish to take responsibility.

I. To put this into perspective, how do you think the courts would rule on a father who hands his 3 year old son a loaded gun and then tells him not to pull the trigger and then leaves for the store?

When the 3 year old shoots his baby sister, who do you think the courts will find culpable?

V. Moral evil is the result of not only the misuse of our freedom, but the result of the separation of responsibility from freedom.

A. For a recent example we can look at our recent financial collapse.

Who should take responsibility:

1. regulation free policies of the Bush Administration,
2. lobbyist friendly acts of Congress,
3. banks,
4. Wall Street,
5. insurance companies,
6. the people who bought houses they couldn't afford,
7. was it the greed of most of us, as with love blinded eyes we all swooned at the irrational bubble that inflated the stock market and our pension funds?

B. Everybody points the finger somewhere else and like the old Family Circus cartoon it was that little ghost called "Nobody" who was responsible.

C. Yes, everyone wants to be closer to free.

1. Everybody wants to live How they wanna live.
 - a) **Everybody wants the freedom to live as if the world revolved around them and they should be free to act however they want without consideration for how it may affect the world around them.**
 - b) **But where two or more are gathered freedom must be coupled with responsibility or evil will happen.**

2. And everybody wants to love Like they wanna love.
 - a) **Everybody wants to be loved and most fantasize of the free love that was promised in the 60s.
You all know what I'm talkin' about without goin' into details.**
 - b) **But where two or more are gathered freedom must be coupled with responsibility or evil will happen.**

3. Everybody wants respect Just a little bit.
 - a) **Everybody wants and wants and wants as if just livin' somehow gives them a right to have it;
respect and anything else they may want.**
 - b) **But where two or more are gathered freedom must be coupled with responsibility or evil will happen.**

- VI. Everyone wants to be closer to free, but nobody wants to take responsibility for it – nobody wants to pay for it.
- A. It's not my fault that schools are closing.
 - B. It's not my fault there's no funding to fix the roads and bridges.
 - C. It's not my fault the ice caps are melting.
 - D. It's not my fault that the rainforests are disappearing.
 - E. It's not my fault that libraries are closing.
 - F. It's not my fault that the world still teeters on economic collapse.
 - G. It's not my fault that there are too many people for the earth's resources.
 - H. It's not my fault that the social safety net is withering to tatters.
 - I. It's not my fault that kids don't learn history or that Paul Revere warned the English.
 - J. It's not my fault that so many mentally ill veterans are homeless.
 - K. It's just not my fault – I'm not responsible.

VII. As we celebrate our independence here's a couple news flashes:

- A. First, living in a democracy does not mean that nobody is responsible, it means that everybody is responsible.
- B. Second, for those of us who wish to be disciples of Jesus, our freedom is not freedom from, but freedom to -- Freedom to love others.
 - 1. Our freedom is to be free to take responsibility for how our actions affect others.
 - 2. Our freedom is to be free to respect how others choose to exercise their own freedoms.
 - 3. Our freedom to love ourselves must be linked to our freedom to love others, as two sides of a coin are linked – or evil will happen.

VIII. There is no freedom without responsibility and the illusion that it is possible is the primary source of moral evil and our separation from our God, who not like the one in the second creation story, really does take responsibility.

- A. In fact, the story of the incarnation of God in the man Jesus of Nazareth, was that God took responsibility, takes responsibility, for all of our actions; even to death on the cross.
- B. Let us pray that we will have the courage to be followers of Jesus and be responsible.
AMEN.