

Date: August 23, 2009

Title: King of the Hill No More

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Scripture: Gen 2:19-25; 3:1-7 NLT

**Genesis 2:18-25 (NLT)** <sup>18</sup> Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." <sup>19</sup> So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. <sup>20</sup> He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him. <sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> "At last!" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'" <sup>24</sup> This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. <sup>25</sup> Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

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Now, there is a whole second section to our scripture for this morning, but I want to stop in the middle of it so I can talk about bit about this part.

What I want to point out here is that Human beings were, from the beginning created for relationship. Adam was created from the mud God used and then the very breath of God was used to start the process of human life. (Please don't see this as a biology lesson on the creation of Human beings, we are talking philosophically and spiritually here not scientifically) The point is that our humanity began with the breath or spirit of God giving us life. In other words, there is a very close connection between God and our species. God created and set in motion all of life, but right from the first there was a special bond between human beings and God. We honestly don't know *why* God created us. We are here and we can presume that since God went to the trouble of creating us, there must be some good reason for our existence.

But God didn't just create us to live isolated solitary lives; we were created for relationship. First we had a relationship with the animals. The act of naming the animals is an act of observation and understanding. Adam gave them names based on what he observed about each of their natures. If it was just a question of calling an animal any old thing, he could have just

numbered them as he saw them; “there’s animal number one, there’s animal number two and so on.” But Adam didn’t do this; he **named** each one of them.

So, Adam had a special relationship with the animals as anyone who has ever kept a pet or farm animals can understand, but our scripture tells us that a relationship with the animals was not enough. God wanted Adam to know what it was like to know another being who was created different, yet very much the same. Scripture says that the woman was created from Adam’s rib. With our scientific understanding, we might take this to say that they shared the same DNA with God making some very important differences that I won’t go into right now.

The point is that God saw that it was not good for this first man to be alone and so God made a suitable companion for him; not a slave or another beast of burden, but an equal with whom he could have a person-to-person relationship. This relationship was free and easy and there was no need for clothing because they were in perfect relationship with each other. They could be vulnerable and at ease with each other because they had nothing to prove and nothing to hide. Each of them had everything they needed so there was no need for competition. The Bible shows us the absolutely perfect marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Right and in we can imagine that the experience of this couple was made all the more complete when in the cool of the evening after a nice day tending the garden, God would come by and sit on the front porch and chat with them both.

But of course, we know that the perfect marriage and the perfect relationship didn’t last. We have no way of guessing how many years Adam and Eve were happily married living in the garden, but at some point, everything changed. And the change that occurred sent a shock-wave of pain and suffering down through the ages that has affected the lives and especially the relationships of every person from that time to this. In his book, Searching for God Knows What, Author Donald Miller calls what happened next the “Chernobyl of Eden.” It was the equivalent of a nuclear reactor meltdown that spread the deadly pollution of fear and envy everywhere. So, let’s read what happened:

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**Genesis 3:1-7 (NLT)** <sup>1</sup> The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?” <sup>2</sup> “Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in

the garden,” the woman replied. <sup>3</sup> “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’” <sup>4</sup> “You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. <sup>5</sup> “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.” <sup>6</sup> The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. <sup>7</sup> At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

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Our first scripture ends with Adam and Eve happily spending time with each other and with God without need for clothing or protection of any kind. Our second scripture ends with the same two people trying desperately to cover their nakedness and to hide from each other and from the One who gave them life and with whom they had the deepest and best relationship of all.

And so, this begins our story and God’s story; His-story which has been occurring for thousands of years as human beings have done their best to recapture that ideal relationship that is somewhere in our deep subconscious memory of a time when all was well.

Now this may all seem pretty esoteric and philosophical to many of you, but the reason I have been talking about this in such great detail is because this story of Adam and Eve and the serpent explains a great deal of why there is so much pain and fear in the world.

Adam and Eve ate from that poisonous *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* and some of the juice from the fruit of that tree is apparently still flowing in our veins today because every one of us seems to act as if we know what is good and what is evil. And with this juice flowing through our veins; with full confidence in our own ability to know Good from Evil we condemn others and we condemn ourselves.

But, under the scrutiny of that condemnation, far too much of the energy of our lives is spent ranking things from good to evil. For example:

- Vegetables – Good
  - Red Meat – Bad
- Mystery novels – Good
  - Romance Novels – Bad

- High mileage non-polluting cars – Good
  - Large gas-guzzling cars – Bad
- Large comfortable American-made safe cars - Good
  - Small foreign tin-can cars - Bad
- Mother Teresa – Good
  - Hitler – Bad
- Christians – Good
  - Muslims – Bad
- People who dress and think like I do – Good
  - People who dress and think like idiots - Bad

Do you see where this can go? Pretty soon we find ourselves clawing at each other to make sure that we are at least a little above the undesirables we see everywhere. We find ourselves in a very serious game of “King of the Hill” fueled by the belief that the **very** undesirables who are somewhere down in the ranking are not likely going to get the love and respect from other people they are seeking because...well, let’s face it, they probably don’t deserve it.

See if this doesn’t seem like a recipe for disaster:

We human beings, who are designed to seek more than anything else the love that can only come from a deep and genuine relationship with God and with each other are fooled into believing that only a few of us will be found worthy enough to have that relationship. So, with a limited and oftentimes grossly twisted picture of reality, we believe that our lives are one big competition and what is at stake is a place of worth somewhere near the top of the pile. And if we do not have the gifts that will take us to the top of one pile, we tell ourselves that we don’t believe in their pile, it is the top of another pile we are trying for.

Most of you have probably seen the bumper sticker that reads: “I’m proud of my honor student.” This is obviously a proud parent who probably doesn’t mean to put anyone else down with this statement; they are just trying to encourage their daughter or son to keep up the good work. But then, you have probably also seen any one of a number of other bumper stickers that say something like: “My kid beat up your honor student.” Apparently, these bumper stickers came from a comedian who used this as part of his comedy routine and then sold the bumper stickers at his comedy shows. He said many times he made more money selling the stickers than

he got paid for the show. I'm sure not every parent felt this way, but many must have felt that their kid was not destined for the top of the academic pile so they would brag about their kid headed for the top of another pile; the physically dominant pile.

And this may seem harmless, but what happens when a whole group of people who are convinced that only *their pile* has value and they want to make sure that everyone agrees with them so they take over political power just to make sure that *their pile* is the one that their society recognizes. Hitler managed to do this. Stalin and Mao Tsi Tung were successful at this in their respective countries. The Taliban have done this in Afghanistan. In every case, there is one group of people that plays a most valuable roll. Without these people the system these people try to put into place won't work at all. When ever someone is trying to say that *their pile*, the pile they are trying put into place, is the best one, someone has to be placed on the bottom of the pile. Hitler put the Jews down there on the bottom of the pile. Stalin and Chairman Mao put the rich down there on the bottom of the pile. The Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan put women and westerner infidels down there on the bottom of the pile.

So the question I guess each one of us has to ask ourselves is, "Who do I put down there on the bottom of *my pile*?" Do I put my fellow workers at my place of employment down there? Do I put the people who come knocking at my door trying to sell me their religion down there? Do I put illegal aliens down there? How about the politicians with whom I don't agree; do they belong on the bottom of the pile? Or here is one that is extremely common and just as insidious. How about yourself? Do you believe that because you have done some horrible thing, **you** belong on the bottom of the pile?

Let me speak some truth here. This is the truth that Jesus lived for and died to bring to us: "No one deserves to be on the bottom of the pile." Let me say that again: **No one deserves to be on the bottom of the pile!** Jesus went freely to the cross so that every person, no matter how ugly or mean or wasteful or destructive could go cleanly before God and say, "God, I want to live my life experiencing Your eternal and ever-deepening love!" To which I believe God replies, "Come on, then!"

You may have lived for years believing that the mistakes you have made would keep you on the bottom of the one pile that really matters, but in the eyes of God, as shown to us through Christ, there is no such pile. You may have lived for years trying to convince yourself and others that you know

what pile is the right one to be on the top of, **but there is no such pile!** There is only Christ crucified and resurrected calling every human being everywhere to forgive others and to forgive yourselves so that each of us might live fully in the saving act of love that allows us to live the lives for which we were created.

Right now, you might be saying to yourself, *“I only wish I could figure out what I was created for.”* To which I believe God would tell you this: *“You have been created for a deep and abiding relationship with Me, God and with the other people that life brings before you.”*

Of course, you will not have a deep and abiding relationship with every person you meet in life, but what would happen if when you met people, you didn't feel like you had to measure yourself against them to see where you stand compared with their position in the pile. What would happen if instead of ranking people, you just loved them because they happen to be fellow children of God. Do you think that might change the quality of your life? Do you think it might make your relationships and your life in general more fulfilling and less stressful?

All of us were created to look for and to live for the love that only God can give. The thing is, we will never find God's love at the top of a pile that was never meant to be in the first place. We will only find it in the outstretched arms of the one who came to die so that we might live and love completely. There need be no ranking, no pile to try to get to the top of, there need only be Christ, offering more and better love than we will ever find anywhere else. Only Christ! Amen.