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Genesis 5:1-24

21st Message

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TWO WAYS OF LIVING, TWO WAYS OF DYING

SERIES: OUR STORY OF ORIGINS

Whose life can be described as blessed? We all want blessing and most of us have ideas about what a blessed life looks like. Our Scripture readings and some of our songs today have described the one who is blessed. For a prelude our worship team sang *Aleph* written by our own James Garcia, based on the first stanza of Psalm 119, the *aleph* stanza (vv 1-8), which begins:

**Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,
who walk according to the law of the LORD. (Ps 119:1 TNIV)**

Or as James rendered it in his song:

Blessed are those who blamelessly walk
and place themselves under the teaching of God;
careful attention to each step they trod,
seeking communion and longing for God.

Our call to worship included this verse:

**Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you,
who walk in the light of your presence, LORD. (Ps 89:15)**

More literally that first line could be translated as “Blessed are those who know the joyful shout.” That joyful shout is not the shout that some of you hope to make this afternoon when the Super Bowl gets under way. It’s the joyful shout raised in praise to the Lord.

Finally our Scripture reading was Psalm 1, which begins:

**Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers. (Ps 1:1 NIV)**

I like how TNIV renders the first couplet: “Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked.” The first two psalms form an introduction to the entire psalter. Psalm 2 ends with the line,

Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Ps 2:12)

So these two introductory psalms are bracketed in the first and last verses with this declaration of who is blessed. This sets a tone for entering the rest of the psalter.

What does it mean to be blessed? In each of these psalms the Hebrew word is *ashre*—used 26 times altogether in the psalter. It’s not the word used for God blessing people. It’s an acclamation used to describe people whose lives are headed in the right direction. Some people translate it as “happy,” but it doesn’t mean quite what we mean by happy. It’s the word that lies behind the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, . . . those who mourn, . . . the meek . . .” (Matt 5:3-10). We would hesitate to call those people happy. When Scripture describes someone as blessed (*ashre*), it is holding him up as a role model. His life is headed in the right direction and he should be emulated.

Who is blessed? The psalter has told us: the one who is not in step with the wicked, but walks in God’s ways, who knows how to praise God, who walks with God. Psalm 1 sets out two ways of living life,

the blessed way and its antithesis. We have seen that Genesis 4 does something very similar, showing two ways of living life. It should be no surprise that there are those whose lives are headed in the right direction and those whose are not, for God announced there would be a mighty struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

After seven weeks in Genesis 4 we move on to chapter 5 where we find that this theme continues. There are two ways of living and two ways of dying. There is life and then there is life that is headed in the right direction, the sort of life that the psalmist would later call blessed.

The chapter begins:

This is the written account of Adam’s family line. (Gen 5:1a TNIV)

Genesis is structured as a series of ten accounts, preceded by a prologue (1:1-2:3). These ten are in two sets of five: the first five cover life before the call of Abraham (2:4-11:26); we might call this the Primeval History. This series in Genesis will cover this material. The second set of five begins with the call of Abraham (11:27-50:26); this is the Patriarchal History, which I will not cover. These ten accounts give structure to the whole book.

The first account was that of the heavens and the earth (2:4-4:26). We were in it so long (16 sermons, nearly 20 months) that it’s hard to remember that we’re supposed to understand it as a unit. The placing of the man in the garden with the woman as his helper; sin, judgment and expulsion from the garden; the division of the human race into Cain and Abel. What started so promisingly, so beautifully quickly went downhill. Of Adam’s two sons the one who did what was right was killed; the one who rejected doing what was right flourished and his line flourished, but he was cursed and his line came to an end. But the account ended with a note of hope: God gave a replacement son and people began to call on the Lord’s name.

The second account is much briefer (5:1-6:8). Labeled the account of Adam, it describes what came forth from Adam, namely his family line. The account has two parts: a genealogy (5:1-32) and a short narrative about the sons of God and the daughters of men (6:1-8).

Chapter 4 was a genealogy but it was broken up by pieces of narrative that kept our interest. Chapter 5 is straight genealogy—how exciting! What should we do with the genealogies of the Bible?

One response is to hit the fast forward button, skipping over the genealogy to get to more interesting material the other side. That’s what many of you want me to do because you want to know what I’ll say about the sons of God and the daughters of men.

But perhaps you’re committed to taking all of Scripture seriously, so you try to slog your way through the genealogy, but you get bogged down. I was talking with one of you a few days ago who set out to read through Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. This person

did fine until he hit Chronicles. If you've been there you know that Chronicles begins with nine straight chapters of genealogies. Here he got bogged down and lost heart.

Some use genealogies to calculate chronology. This genealogy here in chapter 5 and the one in chapter 11 are unique in the Bible in that they give ages. Archbishop Ussher, in the seventeenth century, used these genealogies to calculate that the first day of creation began on the evening before Sunday, October 23, 4004 BC. But most people now accept that these genealogies are unreliable for calculating precise chronologies, for they were not intended for this purpose.

Others think that this genealogy uses a secret code. One popular interpretation assigns meanings to the names then strings these meanings together to give a hidden message showing how to escape impending judgment:

God has Appointed that Mortal man shall Sorrow; but The Blessed God, Came Down, Teaching, that His Death Shall Bring, Strength and Comfort.¹

But there is disagreement on the meaning of some of the names. And is this really what these genealogies were for, to pass on a secret message?

Why do we have these genealogies in the Bible? The Biblical authors incorporated them for a reason. They are not to be skipped over. They don't provide detailed chronology. They don't contain secret messages. These genealogies are there to place people into their history. We're more ready to understand this today because of the recent interest in tracing our own genealogies. Everyone is trying to find some Scottish blood so they can wear a kilt, stay in a castle and eat haggis—well, maybe not the haggis. Genealogies place us into our history. They give us a mental map of where we fit into the world and its history.

I've told this story before, but it bears repeating. It's a story told by Joanne Shetler in her book, *And the Word Came With Power*.² Joanne went to the Philippines with Wycliffe Bible Translators. When she arrived in the remote tribal village which was to be her home for the next many years, one of the older men took her under his protective, fatherly care. Joanne set about learning the language, teaching the people to read, and translating the Bible, starting with Matthew. Her new "father," though he took great care of her, never showed any interest in her work, but shortly after she had finished Matthew, he picked up the finished booklet, saying he wanted to see the fruit of her labors. He opened the booklet to the first page and started to read. Joanne, knowing what was on that first page, urgently suggested that he skip to the next page. But it was too late. He had started reading chapter 1, and he was hooked. After reading the genealogy he said to Joanne, "Why did you never tell me this was in here?" He was soon converted, and immediately wanted to take the gospel to the neighboring villages. He became an energetic and successful evangelist. He had a single evangelistic tool. With Joanne's help he wrote out a genealogy on a long sheet of paper. When he explained the gospel he would hold up this sheet and explain the people's genealogy, starting with Adam, through Abraham, David, Jesus, and down to themselves.

This "primitive" man knew what to do with a genealogy. He understood that it placed him and his people into a bigger story, a story that went back to the beginning of time.

All the genealogies of the Bible serve this sort of purpose. They are not straight historical documents. They are not intended for detailed

chronology. They are stylized and selective. They often highlight the seventh and tenth generations. For example, in that genealogy with which Matthew begins his gospel, he has arranged Israel's history into three periods of fourteen generations, defined by four major events: Abraham, David, Exile and now Jesus, who will make sense of all these defining moments: he is the son of Abraham, the son of David, and will surely bring Exile to an end.

So it is with the genealogies of Genesis. There are four in these early chapters:

1. Adam's line through Cain (4)
2. Adam's line through Seth (5)
3. Descendants of Noah's three sons (10)
4. Shem to Abraham (11:10-26)

The second and fourth of these are very similar: each runs for ten generations, each ends with three named sons, and each gives the ages of each generation. These two genealogies separate the early history of the world into three major events: creation, the Flood, and the call of Abraham. The world might look chaotic, humanity might be in rebellion against God, but history does make sense. There is an order. God is moving his purposes along. Israel, indeed all of humanity, fits into this history somewhere or other. That's what these and all Biblical genealogies do: they show where people fit.

This genealogy of Adam comprises ten paragraphs, covering ten generations, preceded by a prologue.

Prologue

When God created human beings, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "human beings." (5:1b-2)

It is a pity that TNIV has robbed this prologue of its lyrical quality. No English version lays it out as poetry but it cries out for such treatment. KJV at least captures the lyrical language:

**In the day that God created man,
in the likeness of God made he him;
Male and female created he them;
and blessed them, and called their name Adam [Man],
in the day when they were created. (5:1b-2 KJV, breaks added)**

Here in this prologue several important truths are affirmed, or rather re-affirmed, for there is little new here: this little poem borrows heavily from 1:27-28,

**Then God created man in his image,
in the image of God he created him,
male and female he created them.**

God blessed them... (1:27-28)

Despite the chaos of chapters 3 and 4, certain fundamental things remain true:

1. God created man. The verb create (*bara*) appears three times, in the beginning, middle and end, reflecting its threefold use in 1:27. This is a special verb, used only of God and only for significant new creative acts.
2. God created man in his image.
3. God created man as male and female. The two of them together he called "man" or Adam, though this would also be the name of the first male.

4. God blessed them, repeating 1:28. He blessed them so that they would be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. It's very appropriate to put this at the beginning of a genealogy.

It is significant that these four truths are repeated after the sin and judgment of chapters 3 and 4. It is important that we reaffirm them today when these four truths are denied by much of society.

1. Humans are more than just animals. However God actually made the first humans, they were more than just evolved animals. The use of the verb "create" in chapter 1 separates the cosmos into a hierarchy of 3 levels of increasing specialness: inanimate objects including the heavenly bodies and the vegetation; then the living creatures; and finally humans. Humans are more special than the animals. We are the special creation of God.

2. Humans are made in the image of God, no matter how badly that image might be marred by the fall. This is why we should treat all people with dignity including the unborn, the aged, the sick.

3. Humans are male and female. Both have equal dignity but they are not interchangeable. Marriage is made of a male and a female.

4. Procreation is good. Sex within marriage is good. It is under God's blessing. The continuation of life is part of God's intention.

With these truths reaffirmed the genealogy begins.

The Genealogy

The genealogy itself consists of ten paragraphs covering ten generations. There is a standard format to each generation; each consists of three elements:

1. X lived i years and fathered Y.
2. Then X lived j years after fathering Y and fathered other sons and daughters.
3. All the days of X were k ($=i+j$) years, and he died.

That's what the life of each of these people is reduced to: living, procreating, dying. What a sad obituary!

But in four paragraphs the pattern is broken: the first (Adam), seventh (Enoch), ninth (Lamech) and tenth (Noah). We need to pay close attention to these places.

Adam the first generation

When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died. (5:3-5)

The pattern is broken slightly for this first generation to state that Adam passed on his likeness and image to his son Seth. Since Adam was himself in the image and likeness of God, it means that the image of God is passed on down from generation to generation. Again this is despite the sin and chaos of chapters 3 and 4. Humans continue to be special.

From Seth to Jared

The genealogy continues with the pattern unbroken from Seth, to Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel and Jared, until it reaches the seventh generation Enoch. All these people lived remarkably long lives. This genealogy and the one in chapter 11 are the only ones to give ages. For each generation three numbers are given: the age at fathering what is presumably the first-born son, the remaining years of life,

and the total. What numbers these are! Most lived into their tenth century. What are we to make of these numbers?

One approach is to assume that conditions before the Flood were more conducive to long life. Perhaps a protective blanket of water vapor filtered out harmful ultra-violet light. A comparison with the genealogy in chapter 11 shows that lifespans before the Flood were indeed much longer.

Another approach is to assume the numbers have some sort of symbolic meaning. Many have noticed a similarity to the Sumerian king list of the pre-Deluge rulers of the land of Sumer in southern Mesopotamia. The earliest version lists eight kings; a later version gives ten. Both lists give the length of reign. These numbers are huge: the eight-king list covers 241,200 years, the ten-king list 432,000 years. But in both lists each of the numbers can be divided by 3600 (60-squared), an important number in their sexagesimal system which we still use today. This is surely significant, but no one can agree on what the significance is.

People have tried to treat the numbers of Genesis 5 similarly, but with much less success. If you multiply by this number, and add that number, or maybe subtract twice that number, perhaps you have something significant. I assume that these numbers are significant but no one has yet found that significance. This is true even of the two numbers that are asking to be taken symbolically: the 365 years of Enoch, and the 777 years of Lamech.

Enoch the seventh generation

When we come to the seventh generation the pattern is broken dramatically:

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. (5:21-24)

Enoch's life covers four not three verses. When I teach this chapter in a classroom setting I have three people each read a verse in turn. For the first six paragraphs they each read the same element. This makes the breaking of the pattern for Enoch very vivid.

There are two major changes. We expect, "Then Enoch lived after he fathered Methuselah 300 years..." but we read, "Then Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years..." Instead of "then he died," we read, "Then he walked with God and he was no more for God took him." Instead of merely living, Enoch walked with God. Instead of merely dying, he walked with God.

Enoch is contrasted with all the others in the line of Seth. "Then he died" has terminated each generation like a drumbeat, and it will terminate the generations after Enoch. For only two generations does this drumbeat not sound: Enoch and Noah, and for Noah it is merely delayed until after the Flood (9:29). But Enoch avoided death altogether. His avoidance of death is linked with how he lived his life.

Enoch, seventh in line through Seth, is also contrasted with Lamech, seventh in line through Cain. Since each is seventh in line they represent the "perfect" outcome of their lines. Cain had let sin in the door, then exiled himself from God's presence. Those choices came home to roost in Lamech, who is the inevitable end towards which the line of Cain had been descending.

Enoch's ancestors had begun to call on the name of the Lord. The outcome of this line, in the seventh generation, is one who walked with God. We are not told anything about what it meant for Enoch to walk with God. But what is clear is that he had a meaningful life and a meaningful passage from this life. In both respects he was what the psalmists would hold up as blessed, one to be aspired to.

Throughout the entire history of the world people have devoted enormous energy and resources to trying to avoid death. Ancient mythologies included stories of the quest for immortality. These usually involved a quest for something magical. The Epic of Gilgamesh, for example, recorded its namesake's quest for the tree of life; he found it but fell asleep before he could eat it, and it was eaten by the serpent which instead got immortality. The Egyptian Pharaohs devoted a large percentage of their nation's resources to preparations for death.

Enoch was different. He was spared death, but not by eating any magic plant or potion. He was spared death because of how he lived his life: he walked with God. This was something that started long before. He walked with God both in his life and in his "death." His earthly life and his passage from earthly life were matched. In both life and "death" he walked with God. There was a consonance. It wasn't a matter of getting a magic potion that gave him a ticket to immortality at the end of life without respect to how he actually lived his life. Sadly many today treat the gospel this way.

This short notice about Enoch is held up as a model for Israel. The ideal way of living life, the way exemplified by the seventh from Adam, is to walk with God. Three generations later Noah found favor with the Lord (6:8). The next verse shows why: "it was with God that he walked" (6:9). Subsequent verses do show what walking with God meant: whatever God commanded Noah, so he did (6:22; 7:5, 8, 16). Later the Lord called Abraham, "Walk before me and be blameless" (17:1), calling him to the same life as Enoch and Noah.

We are told tantalizingly little about Enoch. This paucity was so tantalizing that many legends developed about him. But there is no factual basis to any of these stories. The New Testament does mention Enoch twice, once as an example to those walking with the Lord, the other as a rebuke to those not walking with the Lord. Enoch is the second listed in the hall of faith:

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Heb 11:5-6)

Enoch pleased God. This is how the Septuagint translated the term "walked with God" in both instances. It pleases God when people walk with him. Enoch did so by faith, not by sight. He had to believe that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Enoch, though himself pre-Israel, was held up as a model for Israel. The writer to the Hebrews held him up as a model for Christians of the first century. And he is still a model for us today. Of him we can acclaim, "Blessed!" Blessed was Enoch for he walked with God.

Jude also invoked the example of Enoch, but in a negative sense as a warning to the ungodly. Writing about wicked men who had infiltrated the church, Jude said,

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." (Jude 14-15)

Enoch's life of walking with God is an example to both the godly and the ungodly: an example for the godly to emulate, and a warning to the wicked of impending judgment.

What does it mean to walk with God? Walking is a frequent metaphor in both testaments for how one lives one's life. Walking with God means walking to the beat of a different drum. Walking in step with God means walking out of step with the world. Walking with God means to take delight in the Lord. Walking with God means following his commandments. The focus is not on keeping the commandments per se, but on doing what pleases God, following the pattern which he has laid out for the blessed life. The Pharisees of Jesus' day got this very wrong. They were very serious about their walk, about keeping all the commandments which they thought God had prescribed. They called this *halakah*, "walking." But they were so focused on keeping these laws that they lost sight of God and ended up walking far away from him. Jesus dismissed it all as the traditions of men. Sadly there are many today who have turned walking with God into a list of rules and regulations.

None of this is easy. But God doesn't leave us alone. Through Christ he brings us into a new line of humanity, a new genealogy. Through Christ he has broken the power of death. When we read of Enoch that he walked with God through death we don't know how it was possible. But with the death and resurrection of Christ we now do know. And God puts his Spirit in us to transform us, to change our passions and abilities, so that we actually can walk with him.

This genealogy was given to form part of Israel's mental map. History has meaning; it is headed somewhere under the protective care of God. And walking with God is what matters in both life and death. Blessed are those who walk with God.

1. Ray Stedman, "Adam's Book," sermon no. 324, Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, 1968.

2. Joanne Shetler, *And the Word Came With Power* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1992).