

Sermon Notes June 9, 2024

Focus Garden of Eden and Belzebul

Readings *We follow Track II in the summer*

Genesis

Let's begin at the beginning. Adam and Eve have a great time until Genesis 3. Then a talking snake deceives them, and death enters the Garden of Eden. The snake is rebellion incarnate. After the fruit is eaten, shame descends, and before their eviction from the garden, Genesis 3 says

“He (the offspring) will strike your (snake’s) head, and you (the snake) will strike his (the offspring’s) heel.”

A son of Eve will crush the serpent (foreshadowing, hint, hint) and make things right, but he will die in the process. This offspring, this **Zera** (Hebrew) is going to bring the garden (creation) back into order. The family of Abraham, sons and daughters of Eve, carry forward this promise. Much later, King David is part of Abraham's lineage. Maybe David is the promised Zera? But David fails to be the Zera, so the prophets are looking to the future for the Zera, the messiah who will bring things back to order.

The New Testament

The Gospel writers believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah / Zera, the Son of Eve. Remember Genesis 3? *he (the offspring) will strike your head, and you (the snake) will strike his heel.* The snake and the Zera would die together. But in Jesus, there is a twist. Jesus received a snake bite that kills him -- the cross, yet by his Resurrection he crushes the snake - evil's death grip on the world. Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of the return to creation's initial harmony given to Adam and Eve

Gospel

I wanted to hopscotch from Genesis, to David, to the prophets to Jesus to frame the very strange language of the Gospel today. Jesus' family and the religious leaders thought he was not well

They went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.”

The family and the leaders don't understand him, so God's Zera, Jesus, the promised offspring was going to make his own family of those who do understand-

They said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Whoever listens is part of the family. His blood family missed the point, and the leaders would say just about anything to shut him up. Frustrated, Jesus says,

“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” – for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

“Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” makes little sense to us. I would not read too much into this. Jesus, sick of being slandered, was trying to shake his accusers awake. Jesus knew he was the promised offspring, the Zera, in their midst. And Jesus was (and is) the one to bring the garden back into proper order. He was not trying, I think, to condemn his family, but he was specifically attacking the leaders for their cynicism.

Belezebul meaning

The religious leaders were blaspheming the Holy Spirit by calling Jesus the “lord of poop.” I mean this literally. Belezebul was the “Lord of the flies” (you know where flies like to gather). Belezebul was a title that the Hebrews used for the Philistine God of Ekron. The Hebrews were calling Jesus a slang term for an enemy of Israel’s God. All that nuance is lost today if we just make Belezebul = the Devil.

Rabbit trail, Gospel of Nicodemus :

You’re not wrong to not understand. This term has morphed not only in culture but also in ancient texts. Belezebul has come to mean the Lord of Hell today. This is well divorced from the biblical, slanderous term “Lord of the flies.” One text that leaves this understanding altogether is called the Gospel of Nicodemus.

At one point in that story, Belezebul gets bad news from his boss Satan. Satan brags that he dragged Jesus to Hell, but *plot twist* - Jesus is busy releasing people from Hell. Hell is so poorly managed that Jesus demotes Satan from top boss and makes Satan Belezebul’s prisoner.

Today

We are good at losing the thread to focus on one skewed and misrepresented detail in order to ignore the weightier issues. I can just hear the ancients now sounding a lot like today, “sure the blind see, the lame walk, the broken are healed, but who cares? Did you hear? He’s a real piece of...”



An oldie, but a goodie

Finally

Then and now, Jesus wants to shake us up. Family is super important, but not everything. Jesus offers us spiritual family that is sustaining and does not draw flies.

Todd