

# The Way We Were

Dr. Bruce Hedgepeth



Genesis 2:4b-25

## I. IN THE BEGINNING

The way you begin telling a story is important – don't you think? For example, what comes to mind when I read the words:

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair"?*

Right – Charles Dickens and his *Tale of Two Cities*. He begins with a memorable sentence. In honor of Pastor Steve, who'll be back from his sabbatical in just two weeks, what do you think of when I quote this beginning sentence: "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it"? Since I mentioned Pastor Steve, you're probably thinking it's something by C.S. Lewis and you're right, but which of his books begins with that line? It's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Or how about this great first sentence: "Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board" – where does that line come from? It's the way Zora Neale Hurston begins her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

If the way a fictional story begins is important, then the beginning of the greatest true story ever told is bound to be of tremendous importance – wouldn't you agree? This morning we begin our journey through the Bible and we are starting in the creation account in the book of Genesis. As you noticed when I read our scripture passage for this morning, we didn't start at the very beginning of Genesis. If we had started in the first verse of the first chapter in the Bible, the words would have probably been even more familiar to you: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

You probably know how Genesis, chapter one, goes on to describe the six days of creation and how God spoke everything that is into existence: light and darkness; sky and water; land blooming with vegetation; creatures to inhabit the sea and the land; and finally humankind. The writer of Genesis tells us that God saw everything he had made and it was very good. And on the seventh day, God rested.

So we pick up the story this morning in the second chapter of Genesis. Although sometimes you'll hear our passage referred to as a second account of creation, I think it's better described as a retelling of the creation story that is focused on the Lord's plan for humankind. It tells us about the way we were

in the beginning. It tells us that God created our kind from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into our nostrils. It tells us that the Lord gave us important work to do in tending the garden. It tells us that we were given great freedom in caring for the garden and enjoying the abundance of the good earth God had made. And it also tells us that the Lord set limits on our freedom. There was the fruit of one tree in the garden that God declared off limits. It tells us that the Lord wanted us to live in relationship with other creatures, but it wasn't until God created woman that man found a partner.

**“The way it will be is that God's space will descend to earth and the new Jerusalem will recreate what the Lord spoke into existence in the beginning: a place where God and his children are in intimate relationship...”**

That's the way we were in the beginning: man and woman made to live in community together; called by God to the important work of tending the garden and caring for the other creatures. We lived in the abundance of God's creation. We lived in incredible freedom.

## II. THE WAY WE ARE

And yet, we did not live within the limits the Lord set on our freedom. When you read Genesis, chapter 3, later this week you'll find the account of our rebellion against God. You'll read how our sin broke our communion with the Creator, damaged our relationships with each other, and marred God's good creation.

A few weeks ago, in one of our Staff Leadership Team meetings, as we were discussing this year's theme of "Prepare the Way of the Lord," Laurie Haas shared a video which I

think provides a good overview of the way we were, the way we are, and the way we will be. Let's watch it [*video shown here*].

So that video refers to the way we were in the beginning. That's what we've been talking about today. Then it talks about the way we are now as a result of sin and evil and death

in the world. It talks about Jesus and his role of bringing together heaven and earth. We'll be spending most of this coming ministry year studying parts of the Bible that deal with what God has done to address the problem of sin and evil and death because it is the way we are. But the video also addresses the future: the way we will be.

### III. THE WAY WE WILL BE

Spoiler alert: if you're the kind of person who likes to be surprised at the end of the story in the Bible, you might want to cover your ears because I've got a revelation to share. Are you ready? God wins. Yup, it's true. God wins in the end. The power of sin and evil and death are no match for the Lord's decision to bring reconciliation and restoration to humanity's relationship with him through the death, resurrection, and second coming of Jesus Christ.

And speaking of revelations, or the Revelation of John in this case, that's where we read about the Lord's final victory. That's where the way we were and the way we will be come back together – just like they showed in the video. Listen for yourself to the way God will take us back to the beginning, but this time the image is of a city – the new Jerusalem. Here it is from Revelation 21:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And*

*I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children..."*

Read it for yourself in the first couple of chapters in Genesis and then read the last two chapters in the book of Revelation. The way it will be is that God's space will descend to earth and the new Jerusalem will recreate what the Lord spoke into existence in the beginning: a place where God and his children are in intimate relationship; a place where we experience community with each other; a place where we have good and important work to do. That's the way it will be.

So this coming ministry year is about getting ready. It's about preparing the way of the Lord. And I invite you, I encourage you, I challenge

you: participate in every way you can. Make it a priority to be in worship every Sunday. If get sick or have to out of town, catch up by watching the service on our website. But don't stop there. Prepare the way of the Lord by making a commitment to personal worship and study of scripture. Use the readings that are printed in the worship guide each week. Our children and students, worshippers in the sanctuary and in The Garden, we'll all be taking this journey together. Prepare the way of the Lord by connecting with brothers and sisters in Christ in discussions about what God is saying through this study. Get involved in a small group or a class, or just have a conversation at home – beginning today! Let us prepare the way of the Lord.



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**September 13, 2015**

Church of the Palms

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