

LESSON 14: WHO ARE WE, REALLY?

(1 Cor. 15)

When reading the books of the Torah, many people get bored and either just want to get through it or quit reading it altogether. While that is unfortunate, I understand. I have to force myself through certain parts of the Bible also. I hate to admit it, but it's true. In our day and age, we want to get to the bottom of things as quickly as possible. Most of us don't want to have to struggle with figuring out things. We want the solution and then move on as quickly as possible. But the Bible is a book upon which we are to meditate. It isn't just an ordinary book. It is Meditation literature. It is to be read and then chewed on for a while.

My point is that when reading the Torah, apart from what is written being foreign to us, there is a great deal of repetition. Everything is explained over and over again using the same phrases. But there is a reason for that. Everything that is stated is repeated in order to teach. Most of us have heard the expression, "Repetition is the best teacher." So, all the things that are repeated are there for that reason. All the different sacrifices, though there are similarities, are there to show the holiness of

God, among other things. The Law served to create a culture that was so different from the surrounding nations, that it would cause people to be curious. All these laws focused on the holiness of God and His centrality to the nation. God was in the midst of His people and their world revolved around Him.

Some of that has been lost in our modern world. In order for that to be restored, we need to know how we are. We now live in a day of identity politics, where people are separated according to various labels and triggers. But those things only serve to make us more fractious. Whereas, God wants a unified people whose foremost identity is Jesus. Part of that message is what we have been talking about all these weeks as we have been going through the meta-narrative – one long story, running through the Bible, that points to Jesus. Part of that story is the answer to the question of who we are, meaning what our destiny is to be.

Last week we talked about being in the world, but not of the world. We have been saved from this world because we are now children of God – members of His family.

Eph. 2: 8,9

For **by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

God's original plan was for Adam and Eve to grow into an earthly family that mirrored His heavenly family. He wanted these two families to merge. That was/ is His intention and purpose for creating all this in the first place. He did this in the beginning, before time as we know it, existed. His heavenly family was there before creation, watching everything.

God questioning Job.

Job 38: 4-7

**“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,
7 when the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”**

The “morning stars” is another name for the heavenly host, God's divine, heavenly family.

Glorification:

Theologians speak of, among other things, three different areas of our Christian existence. The first is salvation. This is where we believe the Gospel and Jesus becomes our savior. That is instantaneous. At

that point, we are adopted into the family of God. Next, there is our sanctification. That is essentially our growth as Christians as we walk with God in our daily lives. It is a journey whereby we are challenged by the Word of God and begin to morph into “better” imagers of God. It is a marathon, not a sprint.

Lastly, there is the idea of glorification. This refers to what we will one day be. Many of us have heard that one day, upon our deaths or the coming of Jesus, that we will be changed into new creatures – have a “heavenly body.”

1 Cor. 15: 40-49

⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

1Cor. 15:42 ⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; ⁴⁴ it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, ⁴⁵ “The first man Adam became a living being”; ⁴⁶ the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, ⁴⁷ a man of dust; ⁴⁸ the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, ⁴⁹ so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just ⁴⁹ as we have borne the image of the man of dust, ⁴⁹ we shall ⁴⁹ also bear the image of the man of heaven.

In this passage, Paul tells us about our resurrection bodies and even compares them with the bodies in which we currently reside. Once again, most believers have heard this before, but haven't really made the connection with how this works within God's original plan. God's heavenly family are considered "divine." This is simply a way of stating that they aren't like us, in this world. They are spiritual beings unencumbered by the same things we are on earth. Whether they are angels, cherubim, seraphim or what we have been referring to as the divine council, they are all created beings, and they are positioned above us in the hierarchy of Heaven. But what of the fact that one day we will be like them? First of all, we have to know that we are children – "sons of God" and what all that entails.

1 John 3:1,2

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Paul once again refers to our glorification. The "day" when we will be glorified in the same type body as Jesus was after His resurrection.

Peter referred our glorification as, "partakers of the divine nature."

2 Peter 1:3,4

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own

glory and excellence,⁴ by which he has ranted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

The Spirit is not in and at work in the believer, so in one sense we are already partakers of the divine nature, but in another sense, there is something still yet to come for those who are now children/ sons of God.

How does the Bible convey this message?

When God disinherited the nations as Babel, He purposed to start over again with Abraham and his wife, Sarah. God called Abraham (**Gen. 12: 1-8**), right on the heels of Babel, (**Gen. 11:1-9**). Through Abraham and Sarah, God would return to His original Edenic plan. God's people, the children of Abraham, the Israelites, were to be a nation of priests, bringing the nations back to the one true God. We can see in the Bible that from a national standpoint, that ultimately failed. But one of those children would succeed. God became man. Jesus was a descendant of David, Abraham and ultimately Adam. Looking backwards, we can see that it was through Jesus, that God's promise to one day bless the nations He had punished at Babel was fulfilled. Paul wrote about it in several places. Here are two of those.

Eph. 3:1-6

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.⁴ When

you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Gal. 3:26-29

for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

In the OT, we have seen that those who were not Israelites lived in territory that had come under the dominion of the lesser gods to whom God had assigned those nations at Babel. These nations had been disinherited from a relationship with the one true God, YHWH. Israel and Israel alone were God's

“portion” of humanity.

Dt. 32:7-9

Remember the days of old;

consider the years of many generations;

ask your father, and he will show you,
your elders, and they will tell you.

8 When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when he divided mankind,
he fixed the borders of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God.²

9 But the LORD's portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage.

In the OT, as Israel comes in contact with these nations, we see them referred to by their geographical and/ or ethnic labels (e.g. Egyptians, Moabites, Amalekites, Canaanites, Philistines), but when we get to the NT, these other peoples from other nations are referred to as **“Gentiles”** – a label that comes from the Latin word for **“nations” (gens)**. If you are not a Jew - an Israelite, then you are a Gentile. That would be the majority of us.

Tying all that together, the story of the NT is that a descendant of Abraham – Jesus – died and rose again to redeem not only Abraham's ethnic descendants (Israelites/ Jews) but also all the people among the nations who had formerly been disinherited from the one true God. Paul referred to the inclusion of the

Gentiles as a mystery. Gentile inclusion is referred to in the OT, but the idea seemed to be an outlier, never seeming to get any traction. The Jews couldn't seem to figure out how that would work. That is why Paul says that the idea came as a "revelation", revealing the "mystery." It would be through Jesus that the Gentiles would be able to inherit the promises given to Abraham. In Christ, anyone who embraces the gospel are children, "sons" of God – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

John 1:12,13

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Gal. 3:26

for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

Rom. 8:14

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

As we can see from these verses, as well as others, the Bible speaks of believers in familial language – family terms such as “sons, children or heirs.” We also read of the concept of adoption into the family.

Rom. 8:23

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Also: Rom. 8:15; Eph. 1:5; Gal. 4:4-5

The familial language is deliberate. It tells us who we are. We are the new divine family of God. Our destiny is to become what Adam and Eve originally were: immortal, glorified imagers of God, living in God's presence. But there is even more to this when we see how Jesus sees us.

The first two chapters of the book of Hebrews give us a picture of God's blended, divine and human family.

Heb. 1:1 – 6

Heb. 1:1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Heb. 1:5 For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”?

Or again,

“I will be to him a father,
and he shall be to me a son”?

Heb. 1:6 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God’s angels worship him.”

We see in this passage that Jesus is the heir of all things. Jesus is better/ higher than the angels (v.4). No angel, or council member of God’s heavenly family is higher than Jesus. In fact, it is because of this, (no angel was fit to become man and inherit the kingdom) that angels are to worship Jesus (vv. 5-6).

But as the writer of Hebrews goes on, we see that when Jesus became a man, for a time, He was lower than the angels. Jesus became one of us. Humans are lesser than divine beings like the angels (council/ heavenly family).

Heb. 2: 5-9

For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?

⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,¹

⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, ²we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹ But we see him ³who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, ⁴crowned with glory and honor

because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Once again, for a short time – His ministry here on earth, Jesus became lower than the angels. Theologians call this the “great humiliation.” Jesus took the ultimate pay-cut in order to fulfill the plan of God. Think of it this way, Jesus left His office of CEO and went down into the mail room.

What was the result of this ultimate pay-cut? Most of us would answer that it was our salvation – and that would be correct, but it isn't the idea, in its totality, that the author wants to convey. As I have said before – salvation is much more than saying a prayer, so we go to Heaven when we die. The author of Hebrews is showing us that because God became man in Jesus Christ, His mortal followers will become divine – and members of the same family.

One day, whether at our death or upon His return, Jesus will introduce us to the rest of His heavenly family. At that time there will be a family reunion of sorts. Once again, look at how Jesus sees us.

Heb. 2:10 -13

Heb. 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.² That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,³ ¹² saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

Heb. 2:13 And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Jesus is not embarrassed that He took the ultimate pay-cut, becoming lower than the angels and came into the “mail room” with us. In fact, it is just the opposite! Jesus revels in this. As we just read, Jesus takes pride in how He will present us to the angles/ council/ congregation. He says, “Behold!” or look, “at me and the children God has given me!” (verse 13b)

What does this mean? It means that our entrance into God’s divine family is our destiny! Look at how Paul puts it in Romans 8:18 – 23:

Rom. 8: 18-23

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul told the Romans they were predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that He should be the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom. 8:29)

To the Corinthian church Paul said:

2 Cor. 3:18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

Paul also told them that our humanity, our human body would be transformed.

1 Cor. 15: 53

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

And for Peter, joining God's divine family meant partaking of the divine nature.

2 Peter 1:4

by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

John says it in the simplest way.

1 John 3:2

Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

The apostles tell us that we will leave these bodies behind at our deaths or at His appearing, whichever comes first. And Jesus will proudly present us to His heavenly family in the same bodies as they are.

Why does all this matter? (THIS NEEDS TO BE RE-WORKED)

We have all heard that we need to be more like Jesus – and we should. But this tends to have a negative effect on us. When we hear this, we tend to process it only in terms of being good – or maybe “less bad.” It can easily become a performance issue. We turn what is actually an almost incomprehensible idea into a performance obligation – one that is all but impossible. But rather than turn this blessing, our destinies into an issue of performance, which tends to make us feel guilty about our oft- failed performance, we need to let this blessing of what He did, and will do, rewire the way we think about being like Him.

If we aren’t careful, we can turn Christlikeness into a task we must perform in order to keep God from being angry. **That is bad theology. It translates into a “works- based theology.” It turns grace into duty.**

We need to be grateful that one day we will be what God is excited to make us – what He predestined us to be (Rom. 8:29) and thereby live in such a way that people who are still lost and enslaved will want to join God’s family also.

The Christian life in the here and now is not about the fear that we will fail to keep happy the One who loved us while we were yet sinners. The Christian life is really about grasping these two concepts: our adoption into God's family and that God loves us like He loves Jesus – as well as our purpose in God's plan being to restore His kingdom on earth, at least to some extent before He returns.

We are destined to live where He lives, forever. We are His family and His coworkers, with the vocation of helping in the release of those still held in darkness. From Eden to Eden, our lives are not about earning a place in God's family. That cannot be earned. Our lives are about living out and enjoying the gift of our eternal lives. Our lives are now about showing our appreciation for what has already been done out of God's love for us. Receive the free gift. Contemplate and understand what this means for us, as well as those who have yet to believe. And once we understand it, how can we then keep it from those who walk in darkness?