

Part 4. Family

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[0 : 00] This morning, I'd like us to turn back, well, actually, to turn to Genesis chapter 1. We read from Genesis 4, but I want to just read a couple of verses from Genesis chapter 1, the words of verse 27 and 28, where it says, So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.

And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

This morning, we are continuing our series that's called Good Dreams, Better Certainties. And in this series, we are thinking about two crucial truths.

We're thinking about the fact that everybody has dreams. And for all of us, there are things that we long for and aim for in our lives, and we want to say that these dreams are good dreams.

They give us joy, purpose, direction, and these are the things that just get us up on Monday morning and spur us on in a difficult week.

[1 : 13] These dreams are good dreams. But of course, sometimes these dreams don't come through, and that's very difficult, but sometimes dreams do come through, and maybe they don't turn out to be quite what we thought they would be.

But on the whole, everyone agrees that we have dreams. These dreams are good. The second big truth we're highlighting is that the gospel gives you certainties, and these certainties are even better.

And so we've been saying each week, dreams are maybes, they're possibilities, they're hopefulies. And sometimes they come through, sometimes they don't. The gospel gives us promises that are certain and guaranteed and unlosable, and they are even better than even our very best dreams. And as we think about these, we're looking through different parts of the Bible, but we're going to keep coming back to Genesis 1 and 2, because the reason we're doing that is we're highlighting the fact that all our dreams have their origin in the Bible, particularly in what the Bible teaches us about creation in Genesis 1 and 2.

And one of the key lessons that we're wanting to highlight every week is that actually it's only in the gospel that our dreams make sense. Different worldviews, when you push them to their logical conclusion, are not actually compatible with your dreams.

[2 : 42] The gospel, however, makes sense of your dreams and explains them. And not only that, it promises us even better certainty.

So, as I've said every week, and as I will say every week, if you want to discover whether the gospel has any relevance to your life, you need to think about your dreams.

And we're looking at eight dreams that people have. We've already looked at the dream of a home, of a career, and of a relationship. Today, we're looking at the dream of a family.

And in coming weeks, we'll look at sport, wealth, health, and then we'll conclude with holidays and retirement. This is our topic today, the dream of a family.

And for all of these, our headings are the same. We're highlighting that these dreams are good dreams. These dreams are broken dreams. And the gospel replaces these dreams with better certainties.

[3 : 40] That is definitely true of family. So, thinking first of all about how the dream of family is a good dream, when God said, be fruitful and multiply here in Genesis 1, he was establishing one of the biggest sources of joy in human experience.

Because to be part of a family is amazing. And to have a family of your own for so many people is a dream. And there are many, many different aspects to that.

And you think through all the steps of having a family. There's the joy of finding out that you're pregnant. A positive test.

And you think, wow, a baby's coming. There's the exciting nine months of a baby growing in a mother's womb. All the mums in here will probably be saying, well, it's so easy for you to say that as the man.

You didn't have to go through morning sickness and all these other things. Absolutely true. But it is still very exciting. And, you know, baby scans, kicks, all that stuff.

[4 : 47] Amazing. There's the preciousness of a newborn baby. And you think of a tiny wee baby born. Just beautiful. And everything is so perfect.

And it's just indescribable. There's the early years of childhood. Where everything is so cute, isn't it? First giggles and first steps and first words. So many beautiful, precious things. I can say it here because he's not here, so I'm not going to embarrass him.

But one of my favorite memories of when our John was wee, I don't know, he was about three years old, and he stood on the bathroom scales and he said, wow, look at how expensive I am.

And so it's very cute, these early years. And then, you know, the rest of the stage of childhood is such a privilege. You know, when you're walking through all these milestones.

[5 : 43] First day at school. First football match. First time learning an instrument. Holidays together. Going to high school. Walking through the teenage years.

Helping kids through exams. It's all a massive privilege. Massive, massive privilege. There's so much that's precious about that. There's the blessing of siblings growing up side by side and sharing in that special bond that brother and sister, or brother and brother, sister and sister can have.

There's the fun of holidays, adventures, birthdays, Christmas. All of that, brilliant. These are the things that we look forward to in life. And there's the love that's shared across wider families.

So there's the love with aunties, uncles, grannies, shins, all that kind of stuff. Cousins. And there's the beauty of the parent-child relationship. There's father and child.

There's a precious, beautiful bond there. And there's mother and child. And obviously, I don't know exactly what that's like, but I can see that it's beautiful. And there's something that's so precious there.

[6 : 46] And for husband and wife, yes, parenting will maybe have its challenges, but there is something so precious about sharing in that role of parenting together. There's so much that's precious and beautiful about having a family.

So when God said, be fruitful and multiply, I know that primarily that's referring to numerical multiplication of the human race, but it's also the multiplication of a lot of wonderful things.

And there's many, many reasons why Psalm 127 is true, when it says that children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward.

So for so many people, having a family is a dream. And many of you, many of you are enjoying that beautiful dream right now.

And that's not to say that it's easy. There's so many things that are challenging. And that's absolutely true. But at the same time, there is so much that's precious. And we want to savour and cherish those precious years that we enjoy as part of a family.

[7 : 55] And this is part of what makes humanity unique. When we think about the dream of a family, the level of connection and interaction and dedication and delight that we share as humans is completely different and at a completely different level to any other part of creation.

Only humans have birthday cake and Christmas dinner. It's unique to us. God's made us to experience the joy of a family. That dream is a good dream.

But it's also a broken dream. And it's interesting, when you look at the Old Testament in particular, you will see dozens and dozens of examples of how the dream of a family has been broken.

And in the immediate aftermath of the fall in Genesis chapter 3, part of the effect of sin is to bring pain into childbirth.

So you see that in Genesis 3, 16, to the woman God said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. And every mother in here will tell you that's 100% true.

[9 : 10] But it's actually only part of the truth because the whole truth is that sin has brought pain into families that goes much, much further than the agony of childbirth.

And as I said, the Old Testament has got dozens and dozens of examples. And I'm just going to go through some of these with you. We see tension between siblings. That's the passage that we read in Genesis 4.

Cain and Abel, tension was so high that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Later on in Genesis, you see the same thing.

Jacob and Esau, twins, born to Isaac and Rebekah. And yet 2741 says, Esau hated Jacob because of the blessings which his father had blessed him.

Esau said to himself, the days of mourning for my father are approaching. Then I will kill my brother Jacob. And then later on, Jacob's own children, he had 12 children and they did not get on.

[10:18] And particularly, there was a collective dislike of Joseph when his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than all his brothers. They hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

Tension between siblings. You also see tension between parents and children. There's the problem of favoritism. That's part of what lay behind the issues with Joseph and his brothers. But Jacob's own experience had been similar because Jacob was twins with Esau and Isaac loved Esau more and Rebekah loved Jacob more.

So Isaac and Rebekah's husband and wife each had their own favorite child. It caused huge, huge problems. You see later on in the Old Testament examples of rebellion from children towards their parents.

So in 1 Samuel, Eli was the priest. His sons did not follow in his ways. And you can see they were involved in all sorts of things with women, not following what Eli wanted them to do.

Samuel himself had the same issue. Samuel's sons did not walk in the ways of their father. So there's tension between parents and children.

[11:31] And perhaps the most striking example of that is the issues between David and Absalom. Now, Absalom was one of David's sons. David was king in Jerusalem.

And Absalom actually led a rebellion against his father and sought to overthrow David as king. And so you had this awful tension between David the king, his son trying to claim to be king in his place. It culminated in Absalom's death and David was devastated. All sorts of tension. The Old Testament is full of marriage problems of all kinds.

Samson and Delilah is a great example. Again, going back to David, another example was he was married to Michal, the daughter of Saul. But a day came when their relationship had broken down beyond repair.

She saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord. She despised him in her heart. And then David again is another example of this when he destroyed someone else's family by looking out, seeing Bathsheba, taking her into the palace, sleeping with her, and then arranging for her husband to be killed so that it would hide the fact that he had got her pregnant.

[12:47] All sorts of mess. More examples. Wider family tensions. Here's Jacob and Laban. That's uncle and nephew.

And they had a funny relationship. Jacob went to work for Laban. Jacob fell in love with Laban's daughter, Rachel, said, I'll work for seven years if I can marry her.

And when the wedding came, it turned out to be Leah, Rachel's sister, that Laban had given to Jacob. So he had to serve for another 14 years to get Rachel. And if you read on around Genesis 29, 30, 31, Jacob and Laban, tension.

And then again, going back to David, similar, Saul and his son Jonathan, and Jonathan's best friend David. So very complicated. Saul and Jonathan are father and son.

Jonathan and David are the best of friends. Saul hates David. Lots of tension. Lots of difficulties there. And alongside that, you see lots and lots of examples of women who aren't able to have children.

[13:53] So Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and then Hannah here in the example on the screen. All of them unable to conceive. All of that was a huge source of sorrow for them.

And then even in the Old Testament, you get examples of other situations that are rare, but desperately, desperately difficult.

So Rachel, whom Jacob loved so much, mother of Joseph, then went on to have another son, Benjamin, but Rachel died in childbirth.

And so Jacob lost her. And then to go back to David and Bathsheba once more, as we say, David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

He got her pregnant. When the child was born, that child actually died. And so there's just all sorts of difficulties and tensions. And if you read in other places, you can read in Genesis 38 about how Tamar was abused by her family.

[14 : 53] And you can read in Judges, the last three chapters, there's 19 to 21 awful behavior towards family members, particularly towards women. And then again and again, there's also the desperate agony of loss.

And so a good example of that is Naomi in the book of Ruth. She was married. She and her husband went to Moab. There, her two sons got married and her husband died and her sons died. And so when she eventually returned as a widow and with her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth, the people of Bethlehem came out to meet her and they said, is this Naomi? Here at the bottom of the page, you can see.

And she says, don't call me Naomi, call me Mara, which means bitter, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. So these are lots and lots of examples.

I'm sorry that I kind of whizzed through them, but I just wanted to show the scope of the fact that, of how the Old Testament shows us again and again and again that sin has broken the dream of a family.

[15 : 59] And many of us, if not all of us, can look at these examples and think, I know what that pain feels like.

I know exactly what that pain feels like. There's, many people have the pain of not being able to conceive and that agony of watching, watching it happen easily or what seems like easily to others and yet not for you.

There's, there's the pain and difficulty of raising children. for all of us as parents, yes, there's, there's the brilliant moments of Christmas dinner and birthdays and stuff like that, but there's also loads of really, really hard days and times when you're so anxious about your children and times when you worry that you're doing things wrong as a parent and there's times when, when tensions rise and when it's tough.

many, many people experience the pain of a family falling out and that can be maybe within siblings, between parents and children or maybe more widely, relatives, whatever it may be.

There are so many examples. All of us will have experienced it in some way or another and it's so, so tough and people who should be, people who should be sitting beside one another laughing together won't speak to each other and sometimes it can go on for years.

[17 : 29] There's the pain of families breaking up and and so many people experience that for some, some people that is something that they, that they had no control over but it's it's happened to them and for some people that's something that they maybe look back and think, I wish I'd done things differently.

It brings pain. There's the pain of being treated badly and I'm sure everybody here can think of examples either of your own experience or of people you know who've been treated badly by the people who should actually be loving us the best and everyone, everyone in here knows what it feels like to lose someone that you love so, so much and when, when, when somebody in our family passes away we experience a unique pain and a pain that is really hard to carry.

Family is a bit like a glass vase. In one piece a glass vase is beautiful. Broken a glass vase can inflict the deepest of wounds.

but there's one other key point that we need to notice from the Old Testament and not only does it give lots and lots of specific examples of how sin has broken families, the truth is the whole story of the Old Testament is the story of one big broken family.

Israel was called to be God's people and they're even described as God's firstborn in Exodus 4 22 and we often think of Israel in the Old Testament as a nation before we think of Israel as a nation we should think of Israel as a family.

[19 : 19] They're all descended from Jacob. Israel is another name given to Jacob. They're all Jacob's children. They're organized according to their tribes. At the heart of their identity is their family bond and as that family nation Israel is chosen by God to stand out as a light to the world and they failed miserably.

the family fell apart they turned their back on each other and they turned their back on God and you see examples of the judgments given to Israel by the prophets all picks up on this.

I'll just read these through because they're very powerful examples. Ezekiel 22 Behold the princes of Israel in you everyone according to his power you have been bent on shedding blood. Father and mother are treated with contempt in you the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you Micah 7 Put no trust in a neighbor have no confidence in a friend guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms for the son treats the father with contempt the daughter rises up against her mother the daughter in law against her mother in law a man's enemies are the men of his own house and Zephaniah 3 1 Woe to her who's rebellious and defiled the oppressing city she listens to no voice she accepts no correction she does not trust in the Lord she does not draw near to her God that's like the language of just a rebellious and disobedient child all of this is a glimpse into just how much sin has damaged humanity all of it is a glimpse into just how much we need a saviour and this is where we see that the gospel replaces this stream with even better certainties and I want to highlight two key things here as we draw towards a close number one everything that is good about a family is a glimpse of what God wants to give you in the gospel and that's that is an unbelievably important theological statement to understand that everything that is good about your family is a glimpse of all that God wants to give you in the gospel so I want us to think about that and I also want us to think about the fact that God proves the certainty of all of this by repeatedly overcoming the brokenness that sin has caused so these two things first of all every view in the family is a glimpse of all that God wants to give you in the gospel so the dream of a family is a wonderful dream to long for because it's an amazing dream to experience but it's also a brilliant theological teacher because in so many ways the gospel is giving us an even more brilliant version of everything that is brilliant about a family so I'm going to highlight a few things number one the gospel reveals God as the perfect father now I'm sure many if not all of you have heard that many many times we are very used to hearing that language but we must not forget how astonishing this is because this is what makes Christianity unique all across history all across the world people have an awareness of God and they conceive of God in terms of power and authority and majesty and glory and supremacy and immensity that's all true that's all true of the God of the Bible God is all of that but if you are a Christian then God is one more thing he's your father he is your loving father and that means that you are his precious beloved child that's pointing us to one of the most important aspects of the Bible's theology of salvation the doctrine of adoption which is what we read about in Galatians 4 all who put their trust in Jesus are adopted as God's children when the fullness of time had come

[23 : 29] God sent forth a son born of woman born under the law to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons and because you're sons God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying Abba father so you're no longer a slave but a son and if a son then an heir through God now it's important to say that the language of sons not just referring to men it's referring to all of God's people that as brothers and sisters we share that extraordinary privilege of being God's children that adoption is accomplished by everything that Jesus did on the cross where again we must not like we mustn't underestimate how incredible that is that our adoption is accomplished on the cross where God's one and only son was handed over in our place and that adoption is applied through the work of the Holy Spirit the same spirit of God the father and of God the son comes to dwell in our hearts and enables us to see and know

God as our father that identity as God's children now defines us we have the right to become the children of God and that identity secures us God because we are in the father's hands we're in Jesus' hands both hands together and all of it tells you how utterly loved you are the words that we read at the very start see what kind of love the father has given to us that we should be called the children of God for so we are and all of this is so so important for how we understand God some of us here will have had wonderful fathers I have a wonderful father but some of us here won't have known our fathers at all and some of us here might have had very difficult fathers and all of that can either help us or hinder us as we try to understand God because if your father was amazing then that's wonderful but there's a danger that you might think that God's not going to be quite as good as that the truth is he's even better and if your father is unknown you might think to yourself well maybe

I can never really know God but you need to remember that God is everything that you longed for but which you never had and if your father was difficult or weak or cruel then you must remember

that God is never ever like that but the dream of a family actually goes even further than just the fatherhood of God as a family we're nourished and nurtured by the church as our mother now the church has failed in that role many many times but when the church is doing what Jesus wants her to do that's what happens we're taught and raised in the faith we're nourished by word and sacrament we're built up together I'm running out of time but we're going to see if we can finish this quickly we're also united together as brothers and sisters and we're united who rules us and defends us and we must remember that not only that do we have God the father as the perfect father we have

Jesus as the perfect brother here's an interesting question when are you at your most Christ-like when are you at your most Christ-like well there's loads that we could say to that loads that we could say to answer that question but I think there's a strong argument to say that the moment when you are at your most Christ-like is when you come to God and say father that is when you are at your most like Jesus because that's how Jesus comes to his father and that's the relationship we have we're united as brothers and sisters that applies vertically in terms of a relationship with the one father it applies horizontally with our relationship with one another and that's why as a church we are a family as we are saying to the boys and girls today and we share such precious moments together now we enjoy that now we get time together as a church we get to enjoy fun and laughter and joy and adventure we help and support one another in difficult times that's part of what we do now as a church but ultimately the family togetherness that the gospel gives us is forever and Galatians 4 speaks about that because it talks about how we have an inheritance in the gospel now this is something that's so important to remember as brothers and sisters in Christ we have a shared inheritance through Jesus now in this world inheritance tends to be stuff doesn't it houses or money or antiques or whatever it might be in the new creation our inheritance is time time to always be together and to never ever be apart again and so everything that's good about your family is a glimpse of what the gospel is going to give us and God proves the certainty of that by repeatedly overcoming all the brokenness that sin has caused

[29 : 11] I'm going to have to race through this super fast but I'm just going to highlight this you look at the outworking of God's plan of salvation how we call redemptive history how from the beginning of the Bible right through to the second coming of Jesus God is working out his plan of salvation if you look in the Old Testament and in the New you see that God again and again and again overcomes the brokenness that we've described so the pain of being childless is overcome so Sarah Rebecca Rachel Hannah Elizabeth these barren women are the women through whom God's purposes are worked out they become the mothers through whom God's plan of salvation unfolds the mistakes of past generations are overcome Israel fails again and again and again but God does not give up the hostility of division is overcome by the end of the Old Testament Israel had fallen apart you come into the New Testament the Jews and Gentiles want nothing to do with each other in the gospel that massive dividing wall of hostility is overcome and taken down the promise to

Abraham is fulfilled that in him all families of death is overcome ever since Genesis 3 families are being ripped apart by death ever since Genesis 3 families are being ripped apart by death and the gospel has come to fix that it centers on the resurrection and in the resurrection you see that the precious child of God overcomes the ferocious enemy of death all so that you and me can become God's children as well and that means that if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian all death can ever do is take you home to your family family is a good dream family is a broken dream but the gospel replaces!

these with amazing amazing certainties so please look at your family today and please just enjoy everything that is brilliant about your family but please remember that all of that's a glimpse it's just a foretaste of everything that God wants us to have through Jesus Amen let's pray