

Back to God

by Joseph Parker

Joseph Parker's sermon calls for a return to God's original intention for humanity as revealed at creation, emphasizing the need for regeneration and divine wisdom in society.

Scripture: Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:24, Psalm 24:1, Mark 10:6, 1 Corinthians 15:24

Topics: "Gods Purpose", "Restoration"

Description

Joseph Parker preaches about the importance of getting back to the divine intention 'from the beginning of the creation,' emphasizing the need to understand God's original purpose for humanity and society. He contrasts the temporary laws and arrangements made by Moses with the eternal divine plan, urging listeners to focus on God's intent rather than human inventions. Parker highlights the significance of man's relationship with God, with fellow humans, animals, and nature, pointing towards a restoration of the original divine design for all aspects of life.

Transcript

"But from the beginning of the creation God" (Mark 10:6).

THAT IS WHAT WE WANT TO GET AT. We are perplexed, divided, and confused by things intermediate and transient. We have had enough of them. We want to get back to the beginning, back to the divine intent - back behind the beginning, back into the council chamber of the Eternal. The context is graphic and beautiful. The Pharisees came to Jesus and asked him, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?" They tempted the Teacher; they were inwardly mocking him, and secretly endeavouring to entrap him. "And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?" You profess to be devoted to the law of Moses, how does that law read upon the question which you have put to me? "And they said, Moses suffered to write a bin of divorcement, and to put her away." Jesus answered: So far, so good; you are scholars of the letter, very poor scholars, or you would have known that "For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept" - something to be going on with, a piece of paper you can handle and use under limited circumstances. "But from the beginning of the creation God." He did not stop at Moses or the prophets. This Teacher, as prophesied by Isaiah, drew his breath in the fear of God. He was not the disciple of any man: he brought messages directly from the mind and heart of God. We feel, therefore, that we are in company with the right Teacher now. Moses accommodated himself to the hardness of your heart; "but from the beginning of the creation God" made two, man and wife, one: whom, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder!

Thus all the little card-box legislation of all the great teachers that ever invented new schemes of society - all these inventions, suggestions, legislations - are rolled over by this Man whose breath was drawn in the fear of God, and who spake from the steps of the palace of the Eternal. That is what we want to get at. Not what Moses said, not what the Greeks philosophised, not what the Spartans turned into discipline; all this is more or less dignified gossip and conjecture - foolish, or useful for the moment. What we want to get at is God what he meant when he said, "Let us make." If I could convey this thought to you as it is in my own mind, you would be inspired souls, you would take a new view of society and all its arrangements and divers trumperies.

In the context we are face to face with Moses and Christ. Moses, for the hardness of the hearts of the people, made a certain temporary arrangement, but it was aside from the eternal thought; permissible, but not perpetual. So we need minor providences - little bye-laws, small schedules, parliamentary enactments, things to be going on with - to restrain the wanton and the willful; but all these are playthings comparatively. If we could get back to "the beginning of the creation," and, like Christ, draw our breath in the fear of God, legislation itself would be natural breathing, Socialism would be deepest and truest life: "Behold, I make all things new." It is in the nature of a fallen curiosity and debased ingenuity to be making more wordy laws. Jesus Christ brought laws to a minimum. He said, All that the prophets and the law have been trying to say may be summed up in two words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself." Any society that is rich in schedules and bye-laws and subtle arrangements and difficult interpretations of the law is in a bad way. This is the condition of society today: the lawmakers divided, the bench cleft in two. We want to hear the sweet woman-voice of the Man who calls us away from all these things into fellowship with God, union with the Spirit, oneness with the eternal right. Every bolt on your door is a witness against society; every time you turn the key and lock a drawer, you indict human nature. Society is organised scepticism.

What we want to get at, then, is the divine thought, the divine intention "from the beginning of the creation." From the beginning of the creation what was man's personal relation to God? He was the under-god, the companion-god, the visible god, a partaker of the divine nature. What is man now according to our Catechism? A fallen and depraved being. True. "But from the beginning of the creation God" made man in his own image and his own likeness. We are not to be stopped by the law of Moses or by the catechism of theology; we must get back to God's own purpose in setting up man, to whom he could speak, and with whom he could hold communion of heart. How do you describe man? Small, few in days, his breath is in his nostrils, there is none abiding; one dieth in his full strength, another dieth in his youth and never eateth with pleasure; the earth is a graveyard; man is a sinner; man is of small account, he is as a wind that cometh for a little time and then vanisheth away.

Quite right up to a given point; but remember, "in the beginning of the creation God" made man in his own image and in his own likeness - made man immortal, gave him what is called an immortal soul; the soul being the true self. We must get back to that divine standard if we would set a right value upon any human creature that has debased humanity and brought discredit upon the very earth he treads. At present we are looking into reports, into the reports of royal commissions, forsooth! into reports of committees and councils, into examinations and cross-examinations; and we are basing our judgment of mankind or of society upon such reports. We have had enough. The reports are perfectly correct; the reports are useful within given limits; we cannot conduct society as it is at present, debased and degraded, without the assistance of such reports; "but at the beginning of the creation God" made man upright. When you hear of man, you ought to hear of uprightness; but "they have sought out many inventions," and the proudest of

their "inventions" is a falsehood. There is great difficulty in some quarters as to the immortality of the soul. If you start the discussion of the immortality of man from a period after his historical apostasy, you will be wrong; starting from the wrong point, you will come to a false conclusion. What you must do is to get back to "the beginning of the creation." What did God make man when he made him in his own image? - a thing of clay, a thing that could be rusted by time, a thing that would be the sport of the centuries? Never! He made him immortal: the breath that warmed his nostrils came from the mouth of God.

What was man's relation to man "from the beginning of the creation"? Man was man's "keeper." A sweet thought - a divine socialism! - the socialism that is utterly forgotten today amid a thousand pamphlets that are snowed into the gutter. This man hath a dream, and that man a prophecy, concerning altruism, and another man hath a proposition to make. These may be good, they may suit a certain period of time and a certain definition of territory, they may be exceedingly useful within a limited period; "but from the beginning of the creation God"! That is what we want to know. God said, "Where is thy brother?"

This is not a doctrine that can be taught by pamphlets; this is not the issue of some very learned dissertation read before some very somnolent audience: this belongs to the "beginning" of things, this is the a priori condition. We thus get back and back to God's thought: no reformation can ever take the place of regeneration; no socialism can ever overtake the divine idea of man filled with solicitude about man, not happy until the other man is found, not at rest whilst there is one poor little drenched creature wandering about in the wilderness of the midnight. Not a mechanical law. God has no poor-law. We, being made in his image and likeness, should love one another, not by commandment of the letter, but by commandment of the Spirit, by the pressure of an infinite and ineffable necessity - the rush of God upon all the springs and motions of the soul. Man hath sought out many inventions: he tinkers and patches; he legislates and amends and enlarges and undoes; he is, before God, a fool! He doth not hold large commerce with God. When the spirit is right, all literal schedules may be discarded. We shall not be right until we cannot help doing good - until we breathe it, until we are transformed by it. That is the divine idea. God is love. He does not legislate himself into a momentary and evanescent affection; in his soul he is love: that is how he made man at "the beginning of the creation."

At the beginning of the creation what was man's relation to the lower animals? Providential, divine, priestly, educative. There were no wild beasts until there were wild men. We do not heed this. You might have had the wolf on your hearthstone as a gentle, trusting creature. You might have had the nightingale perched on your shoulder, singing you songs of heaven in the dark night. The dog meant and wanted to love you more: you are the dog's god; when his god fell, he became savage. Oh, foolish souls! There is a time coming when the Saviour of the seven spirits, the Prince of the four names, shall rule the earth, and then the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the little child shall play at the den of the cockatrice, and there shall be none to hurt or to destroy in my mountain; for it is holy. The man that would civilise by destruction is a poor man; he takes the very meanest, vulgarest way of making gardens. Being fallen, he must needs have a gun; having made of himself a savage, he must go into the jungle and shoot the noblest beasts that the divine hand ever formed; being himself dehumanised, he must be cruel to his own dog, to his own horse, ay, sometimes to his own children!

When the Lord made all the animals to pass before man that he might name them, it means in the deepest spiritual significance that he might hug them, pet them, endear himself to them, so that the voice of man should be the voice of domination, not in the sense of fear, but in a very subtle sense of acquiescence. God gave man all the animals on the earth, in the air, whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea; yet man has gone to the devil's side, and wants to civilise by pitiless extirpation. The poor fool has now no

remedy but to destroy the aborigines! He would shoot down the blacks; he would evangelise them by laceration. And as for the beasts of the field, he makes weapons on purpose for their destruction, and traps for the purpose of catching them, that he may wound and disable and destroy. "At the beginning of the creation" God meant all the animals to be gentle, beautiful, serviceable, cooperative; but now the little bird, the little redbreast, the little lark, is afraid when man, who should be to him as god and providence and priest, comes near. That is our reputation! To that we have brought things! The very birds are frightened of us.

In the beginning of the creation what was man's relation to productive nature? God gave him all the green things, all the trees, all the herbs; they should be to man for seed and for fruit; and when man tilled the ground, it should laugh in bountifulness of harvest. All the seasons were handed over to man; all nature was to be as man's providing mother; she should say to him, "I am now ready, gather me into the garner, because winter snows are coming; here is thy bread; here is the anticipative answer to all thy winter's necessities." Man has spoiled the harvest; the earth does not hear him. From the beginning of the creation God meant that the earth was to hear the heavens, and the heavens were to hear himself, and there was to be a great interplay of ministry and action; the result being that man was to be knee-deep in flowers, and to have bread enough all the winter long. That was the divine idea "from the beginning of the creation"; that idea is yet to be realised in gospel times. There is a specific pledge or promise to this effect: "Let the people praise, O God, yea, let all the people praise thee; then shall the earth yield her increase." But man, foolish man, undertakes the agricultural question; the nation appoints a Minister of Agriculture!

Was there ever such a living haystack found on all the meadows of time? The agricultural question is pressed upon the attention of Parliament. That may be necessary just now - man may have brought himself into that condition; but the only ultimate and lasting way out of it is to get back "to the beginning of the creation," the divine idea: and when the people praise God, and all the people praise him, a choir large as humanity, an orchestra large as creation, then shall the earth yield her increase, and all garners will be poor to accommodate God's infinite reply.

This is the reason the Church exists; this is the reason that a religious ministry must be kept up. We must get man back to the a priori position, to the divine notion, to what God himself meant when he made man and constructed society. I know that this will get rid of all our intermediaries, all our social ameliorations, all our second causes, all our patchings and tinkerings. Men now read essays upon the poverty of the age - and print them - and forget them; in divers ways they beat the air and take the darkness home. It is very pitiful, but it looks legislative, inventive, clever. Now we are boastfully bringing to bear upon the poverty, the necessity, and the bad condition of society "a statesman-like capacity." O my Father, pity us! Thou didst make us upright, and we have made ourselves "statesmen"!

It will be very old-fashioned doctrine, and very unacceptable to the young and budding genius of the century, when I say that we must get back to prayer, in its real, true, deep, eternal signification, before we can get back to any real prosperity. From the beginning of the creation God provided for sin. Sin is no surprise to Omniscience: the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world; before the sin was done the atonement was rendered. Alas! we make our little plans and our infinite mistakes, and then we say we are as God made us. That is the chief of lies. When you made that statement, that you are as God made you, you told all lies in one black falsehood. Here is the foundation of the Evangelical ministry, here is the beginning of the divine regeneration. Men take all things into their own hand, and, having wrought out the problem, as they would call it, into all manner of confusion and disappointment, they say, "Where is Providence?" You should have asked that question ages ago; you should have got into a right relation to

Providence before you made your first mistake. That which is bad from the beginning can never, saith the Roman law, be made right by any lapse of time. We are wrong at the start, we are wrong fundamentally, and no resolution-mongering will ever be permitted to usurp the throne of the Eternal and to direct the centuries in their moral and spiritual legislation. Back to prayer, to faith, to yourself, as God meant you to be!

The great lesson is to get back to God, get back to "the beginning of the creation." The cry of the day is, "Get back to Christ!" That was never Christ's own cry; his cry was, "Back to the Father, back to God!" We go to Christ that we may get to the Father; we go to the atoning Christ that we may pass on to the pardoning God. Then cometh the end, when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God and his Father, and God shall be all in all. It is a weary way, to hang ourselves on the trees of our own invention. We make suicides of ourselves (notwithstanding the verbal paradox) every day we live; for we will not have God to reign over us.

That is, suggestively, without any attempt at exhaustive elaboration, how the case stands; and until we all get back to fundamental conceptions, and to a realisation of the divine intention, we shall be only making new plans in order to discard them; for man's inventions are shorter-lived than himself. Here is the great call to young preachers, to missionaries of the Cross, to Christian leaders of society. I know you have your altruism and your socialism, and your schemes for making yourselves longer holidays; I know you have your battlings and your strikes and your lock-outs and your various social confusions and misunderstandings: but unless the Lord hath forsaken my soul, and left that soul as an empty tenement, I will say that the only way out of all personal sin and social trouble is by getting back to the divine intention in the making of men and in the construction of society. Who can give us the information and the wisdom that we need? Jesus Christ. He dwelt in the bosom of the Father; he draws his breath in the fear of the Lord. Get audience of him, and he will show you how to build your house upon a rock.

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