

Ordination Paper

God

Moses asked God a question, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

God replied, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I Am has sent me to you.’”

God is the author of all creation. All of life came into existence through his creative power. Paul reminds us that God is the one who sustains life. He proclaimed this to the men in Athens saying, “In him (God) we live and move and have our being.”¹ The creation narrative describes God as one who speaks with creative power and with authority. In the life of Jesus this quality of God surfaces repeatedly. Jesus speaks and the wind and the waves are stilled.² Jesus speaks and life returns to those who were dead.³

God’s involvement with creation did not end with its completion. God created, God saw that what he had made was good, and then God engaged relationally with his handiwork. From the beginning there was a unique quality to the relationship between God and humankind. God created man in his own image, male and female he created them.⁴ He charged them with the unique task of caring for creation.⁵ It was God’s desire to remain in relationship with them as they carried out this responsibility.⁶

Sin

The story of God’s relationship with humankind suffered a break. Remaining in communion with God had always been a choice. For a brief moment a lie was believed. The lie was that we could be like God. Adam and Eve acted on this false belief and ate from the tree which God had commanded them not to eat from. This act brought sin into the story. In the early chapters of Genesis we see the escalation of sin. What began with an act of disobedience⁷ rapidly progressed to brother murdering brother⁸ and ultimately brought things to a point where God deemed it necessary to wash the slate clean, save for one man and his family.⁹ Shortly after the waters from the flood receded even Noah was found drunk and naked lying on the ground.¹⁰ The point being, sin had become ingrained in the current human condition.

Sin has an opposite effect to God’s creative power. Sin destroys. Sin leads to death.¹¹

¹ Acts 17:28

² Matthew 8:25; Luke 8:24

³ Mark 5:41; John 11:43

⁴ Genesis 1:27

⁵ Genesis 1:28

⁶ Genesis 3:8-9

⁷ Genesis 3:6-7

⁸ Genesis 4:8

⁹ Genesis 6:5-8

¹⁰ Genesis 9:20-23

¹¹ Genesis 3:19; Romans 6:23

Jesus Christ

In his wisdom, God enacted a plan to rescue us from destruction and restore the relationship that had been broken. God began this work through a community of people, Israel. He led them out of captivity. He led his people to a land of promise where he meant to dwell with them. Through his people God would reveal his distinct character to the world. The story of Israel reveals the character of God. In their deliverance from Egyptian captivity God demonstrates that he is compassionate, present, and faithful. The Exodus story also reveals our own character. We are prone to forgetting God's faithfulness and trusting in our own wisdom over God's.

With the coming of Jesus, the story of God and Israel took a drastic change. Jesus became the ultimate connection point between God and man. When Jesus proclaimed the presence of God's kingdom¹² he was expressing the reality that God was near. In fact, God now walked the soil of his earth as he had done long ago in the garden. As Jesus continued to proclaim the presence of the kingdom he validated that message through teachings, miracles, and by entering into the lives of the lost and the broken. He lived life as it was meant to be lived, without sin and intimately connected to the heart of God the Father.

The event of the cross is the climax in Jesus' ministry of reconciliation. In that event Jesus, the perfect son of God, took upon himself the penalty for all sin. Because he was human Jesus could suffer the death intended for sinful mankind. Because he was God, the death of Jesus resonated beyond the confines of time and space. His death took the place of the death intended for all men and women through all of time.

The work of Jesus did not end with his death on the Cross. Three days later he demonstrated God's sovereignty in a moment of perfect triumph! The resurrection demonstrates God's unlimited power. God is our deliverer. He released his captive people from Egypt long ago and in Jesus Christ he released all people from captivity to sin and the fear of death. Because of the work of Jesus we can experience victory over sin and freedom from death in him.¹³

All along it has been our decision to welcome the victory of Jesus into our life by receiving his love. Receiving his love involves repentance, intentionally choosing his way over our own.¹⁴ It requires our allowing Jesus to transform us so that we become more like him.¹⁵ We have the power to choose, life or death.¹⁶

As recorded in the Gospels, and Acts, Jesus came to his disciples following the resurrection. He spent time with them continuing to teach them. Finally, he charged them with the responsibility of proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom. He then ascended into heaven where he now sits at the right hand of God the Father.

Jesus is the one who has made salvation possible and he is the one through whom God has initiated his kingdom. Jesus is sovereign and will serve as judge of the living and the dead.¹⁷ Jesus will return and bring his redemptive work to its completion at the appointed time.

¹² Matthew 4:17

¹³ Romans 6:4

¹⁴ Matthew 4:17

¹⁵ Romans 12:1-2

¹⁶ I John 1:9; I John 2:3-6

¹⁷ II Timothy 4:1; Revelation 20:4

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity. The Holy Spirit is fully God. There is one God who exists in three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons of the trinity are not different modes, or forms, in which God appears. They are distinct persons. The three persons of the trinity are not three separate gods, there is one God.¹⁸

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God (*ruach elohim*¹⁹ – later *ruach Yahweh*²⁰), appears throughout the story of God and Israel. The Spirit of God is present at creation and throughout the pages of the Old Testament, the Spirit of God empowers and interacts with God's people. The Holy Spirit continues to empower God's people. Jesus, before his ascension, stated to his disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.²¹ The Holy Spirit did come, at Pentecost, and empowered Jesus' followers to proclaim the good news of his kingdom. On that day the Church exploded!

Through the Holy Spirit, God continues to be present with his people today. The Holy Spirit empowers us to participate in God's ministry of reconciliation.²² The Holy Spirit enables us to listen to and speak with God²³ aiding us in prayer.²⁴ The Holy Spirit continues God's work of sanctification in our lives working within us to help us become more like Jesus.²⁵

The Church

Throughout history God has chosen to work in and through the people he created and loves.

He placed Adam and Eve in the garden and desired community with them charging them with the responsibility of stewardship.

God called Abraham out of Ur and into a foreign land where Abraham would be required to trust in, and depend upon, God completely.

God drew near to Moses and together they led Israel out of slavery in Egypt.

Years later, Jesus called together a community of followers. He taught them about the kingdom of God. He demonstrated to them the power of the kingdom and then empowered them to carry his message forward.

The community of Jesus' followers, which included Jewish and Gentile believers, grew to become the Church. The Church has developed in a multitude of ways over the centuries taking on various shapes and structures. What has distinguished the Church has been its faith in, and profession of, Jesus Christ as Lord.

Scripture

Scripture tells the story of God's involvement with humankind. It is God's self disclosure and through scripture we discover a clearer picture of who God is. Although there are qualities about God which we find embedded in creation,²⁶ scripture reveals

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:4-6

¹⁹ Genesis 1:2

²⁰ Judges 3:10; 6:34; 14:19

²¹ Acts 1:7-8

²² II Corinthians 5:19-20

²³ II Timothy 3:16

²⁴ Romans 8:26-27

²⁵ Romans 8:5-17

²⁶ Romans 1:20

God in a special way. In books like Exodus and Judges we see God as deliverer rescuing his people upon hearing their cries. In the Psalms we experience the internal struggles which come as we engage with God in the midst of life's challenges. The Prophets proclaim God's desire for his people to practice justice and remain faithful to him. The Gospels display our God in the flesh lovingly lifting the heads of the lost and speaking his words of healing into their lives.

As Paul writes to Timothy, "All scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness."²⁷ Scripture provides us with an authoritative voice beyond our own that helps us evaluate our own ways in the light of God's ways.

Call to Ministry

Almost seven years ago I entered a season of seeking God's direction on the next steps he would have me take as I continued to follow Jesus. Through prayer, support, and the mentoring of Pastor Jey Deifell I felt led to begin my studies as a seminary student. At the same time, I was preparing to wed Tegan. We would be moving out to the West Coast, and settling in San Diego. With that move in mind I started to look at West Coast seminaries.

I connected with Fuller Theological Seminary (FTS) in Pasadena, California and began my studies as a distance student while still living in Connecticut. During my six years of study with FTS my knowledge was deepened but more importantly God has brought me to a deeper place of intimacy with himself. I am learning each day how to submit myself more completely to his will and in that process how to hear his voice.

I currently serve as the director of Youth Ministries here at First Church. I love this church for a number of reasons. It is the church of my ancestors who have been a part of its story since 1650. It is the church where I was baptized, confirmed, married, and hopefully soon will be ordained in. It is the church where I have said goodbye to some of the people I have loved the most in my life. First Church has remained rooted in the gospel despite pressures to move in a direction which would lead us away from a faithful response to the work of God in Jesus Christ.

More recently, I have been invigorated as our Servant Leadership Team has worked with Vision New England to develop Vision 21. I believe that God is speaking to his people, globally, in a fresh way. I believe God is exhorting us to look back at the story of the early church. The communities of the early church lived in a world that was hostile to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe the culture we live in today has grown increasingly disconnected from God's kingdom. Despite living in a hostile environment the early church followed Jesus with clarity, and a simplicity, that I long to see returned to our communities of faith today.

I believe that church can manifest itself in an unlimited variety of shapes. As a pastor my greatest desire is to be engaged with other believers who are curious enough to discover and develop church beyond our current boundaries. This work should be done within the framework of orthodox theology but ought to be open to the imagination and ability to create that God has blessed us with.

My ultimate desire is to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ to the point where all areas of my life have been surrendered to his will. With that I long to be involved in the

²⁷ II Timothy 3:16

lives of others coming alongside them as they grow in their own journeys of discipleship. Jesus came that we might have life to the full I long to see that truth become a reality in my own life and in the lives of those God connects me with.²⁸

²⁸ John 10:10