

March 15, 2017 – Isaiah 65:17-25 & John 1:1-14

Over the centuries, people have had some pretty impersonal ways of thinking about God. There were the students of the philosopher Plato, for example. Who taught that God was simply the “First Mover”. The world was a giant set of dominos, in his mind. A series of chain reactions going all the way back to the beginning. God was simply the hand that knocked the first one over.

More recently, we had the Deists. Men like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington and many other founding fathers. Who looked at world like a giant, complex watch, with a near infinite number of gears and mechanisms. That God designed, created, and wound up. But ultimately didn't really do that much in, now that it was running.

And then finally we get to today, with modern spiritualism. If you've ever watched Star Wars, that's spiritualism in a nutshell. God is just a Force that binds the universe together. And we can tap into his this spiritual power for good or evil. But he doesn't really care that much one way or another what we do.

Human beings have always been very good at making God less personal. Of distancing ourselves from him. Of making him seem far away or uninvolved or, even, unnecessary. And yet, the God we read about in the Bible is none of those things. The God of the Bible is really, really personal.

He's a God who walks with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. Personally overseeing his creation. He's a God who cares when the earth becomes violent and sinful. Cares so much that he floods it and starts over with Noah's family.

He's a God who adopts Abraham and his descendents as his own people. His own children. His own nation. And makes a covenant of love and protection with them. And when those people are separated from the land he gave to them and enslaved by a cruel Pharaoh, he personally intervenes on their behalf. Freeing them from Egypt. Revealing to them his unique set of commandments. And guiding them to their Promised Land.

He's a God who even makes his home on earth. Who directs David and Solomon on how to build a temple where his presence will dwell. That any one of his people can come and offer a sacrifice. And know without a doubt that they have met with their Lord.

That doesn't sound to me like a First Mover or a Watchmaker or a spiritual Force. God is much closer to us than many people want to admit.

So why do we resist believing in a personal God? Because you and I do it too. I'm not saying we do it all the time. But I can guarantee that there are moments you do things when you ignore that God exists. When you act in complete disregard to what you know are God's commands and desires.

Which, in reality, answers that question pretty well. Why do we resist believing in a personal God? Well, because if he cares about me, then he also cares that I sin.

If he cares so much that he will walk along side of me in the cool of the day, like he did with Adam, then he also cares so much that he will come looking for me after I sin. And then I'll feel shame and suffer his wrath and all sorts of bad things will happen. And so my first instinct, as Adam's was, is to hide from him and hope he doesn't care enough to come find me.

God's people have been doing this from the beginning of time. Men like Aaron have ignored about God and worshipped golden calves. Men like David have lied to God and thought they could get away with their sin. Men like Jonah have run from God and thought they could escape his will.

But all of it really comes down to one simple idea: if we forget how much God cares, maybe we can get away with our sin. If we convince ourselves that God isn't really very personal at all, then maybe he won't care enough to punish us. If we say that God is WAY up there and we're WAY down here, then maybe he won't see all that I'm doing wrong.

The really sad part about this way of thinking is that it kinda throws the baby out with the bathwater. Yes, God is personally involved in his creation. Yes, that does mean that he cares about our sin. Yes, that does mean he punishes us for that sin. From the Flood and the Babylonian exile, to the eternal suffering of hell and damnation. God cares.

It's in his nature to care about the things he has created. He is not a creator who can see that which he has made be utterly broken and just say, "Meh," and forget that he made it. But that's not a bad thing.

That's really the entire message of John 1. Through the Word of God all things were made. God spoke and it was. Without that word of creation, nothing would have been made. In him was life. Our life. Our life in this mortal life. Our life for all eternity. That's what I talked about last week. God made us. God sustains us. Without him, we are nothing.

But that Word of God that created us didn't just speak and then go silent. He kept speaking. He kept shining into the darkness of our sin. He kept speaking through prophets like John the Baptist. He would not settle for being a First Mover or a Watchmaker or a spiritual Force. God cares.

And so he stepped into our world. We didn't recognize him. But he still cared. We didn't receive him. But he still cared. We rejected him in every way. But he still cared.

He cared so much, that even though we crucified him on a cross, he still gave us the right to become children of God. He still gave us a new birth by water and the Spirit, as we heard this past Sunday. He still made his dwelling among us. Not in a Temple of wood and stone. But in the grace and truth of his Son. Living in this world. Dying on the cross. And giving us his own Flesh and Blood for the forgiveness of sins.

We think we want an impersonal God who doesn't care about our sin. But what we really need and what we really get is a deeply personal God. So personal that he would enter his own creation to forgive our sin. So personal that he cannot stand to see his creation broken. He cannot simply forget that he ever made us.

No, he must restore us. He must restore us in body and soul. He must restore both this broken home he made for us and this broken relationship that separates us. A relationship that was never meant to involve us hiding from him or ignoring him or lying to him or running from him.

And so he does everything to restore this broken creation. Not because he cares about plants and animals and fish and birds. But because he cares about us.

Read through Isaiah 65 and notice how everything he does is for our benefit. He creates a new Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. To take away our sorrow and end our weeping. He creates such abundant life that we forget death even exists. He gives us a land that is fruitful and without hardship. He creates a place that is so safe and secure for us that even the most natural enemies eat peacefully together. And there is no one left to harm his holy mountain.

God created this world in the beginning for us. God recreates this world on the last day for us. And God does everything else in between those two events for us.

God cares. And because he cares, he creates paradise for us. Just as he did in the very beginning. In our sinfulness, we cast him aside and push him away. But in his love, he comes closer and closer. Until he's standing right among us. Hanging on a cross. Doing everything to give us the creation, the life, the eternal life, that we were always meant to have. Amen.