

- ***READ Acts 17:22-26*** In just a couple of weeks, we are going to have another one year old running around our house, and just like any other parents we look back at this past year with a profound sense of gratitude towards God for the blessing that our child is in our lives. There have been many different people who we also appreciate for the good influence and care they have provided for Gabi, but we do thank God above all else because He is the reason that we even have a little girl who is turning one on January 5th.
- I say this based upon Paul's statements that we just read together in **Acts 17:24,25**. In this text, Paul makes the strong claim to the Athenians that it is the God whom they were ignorant of that had made the world and everything in it. He is the one who gives everyone life and breath and all things. We might say, borrowing language from **Hebrews 5:9 & 12:2**, that God is the Author of birth and life. He not only brought us into or birthed us into existence, but He also continues to give us everything that we need to live on this earth. This morning, I would like to consider this vital truth concerning God by taking a big picture look at the Bible as it pertains to the roles that birth and life play in God's plan for mankind. They play a vital role in the grand scheme of the Bible, and we will continually see echoes of birth and life as we go cover to cover within God's Word.

What roles do birth & life play in God's plan for mankind?

I. God shows His desire to give and sustain life in the Genesis account of creation.

- A. To begin to grasp the central Biblical theme of birth and life, we must begin in the beginning for the very ideas of birth and life are seen in the very first verse of the Bible. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* (**Genesis 1:1**) This is the most simple of summations of everything that God spoke into existence during the creation week when He birthed this material world into being when there had been nothing prior.
- 1) **Day One:** Light/Day and Darkness/Night
 - 2) **Day Two:** The Expanse/Sky and Waters
 - 3) **Day Three:** Land, Vegetation, Plants, & Trees
 - 4) **Day Four:** Sun and Moon
 - 5) **Day Five:** Swimming Creatures & Flying Creatures
 - 6) **Day Six:** Land Creatures and Adam/Eve/Human Race
- B. All of these things were brought into existence by God simply speaking them into existence, and they all work together to sustain life here on this earth. We need sunlight, water, food, and all of the above in order to survive, and God was very purposeful in providing these necessities for us. We see this specifically in the recounting of creation in **Genesis 2. Verses 4-9,15** are particularly handy in understanding how everything God created was to work well together for the benefit of God's very good creation.
- C. Everything that God's creation needed to live and survive was provided by our God, and they could thrive in this perfect existence which was exactly what God wanted. *"God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.'"* (**Genesis 1:28**) These great desires of God could be their reality if they would only heed the divine will that was expressed by their Creator in **Genesis 2:16,17**. *"And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.'"* God desired so greatly for their life, but that life would be dependent on their willingness to heed His will in regards to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Sadly, there was one who sought to counteract God in His desires for their life by desiring for their demise and death.

II. Satan then shows His desire for our demise & death by deceiving Eve into disobeying God's commandment.

- A. For some period of time things were going well in God's paradise. Adam and Eve seemed to enjoy a wonderfully intimate relationship with God, and that is said based upon God's *"walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze"* in **Genesis 3:8**. Unfortunately, this paradise was not without any danger or trouble for in **Genesis 3:1** we read of the cunning serpent tempting Eve with the prospect of what she would gain if she ate of the forbidden fruit.
- B. Sadly, the Genesis account tells us that the serpent was able to plant doubt in the mind of Eve and convince her that she would not die in eating it, and in fact she would be better off eating of the fruit that would cause her eyes to be opened so that she would be like God in knowing good and evil. (**Genesis 3:4,5**) The text tells us that Adam joined her in the eating of this forbidden fruit, and their eyes surely were opened to the reality of their nakedness which caused them to hide themselves from God and seek to cover their bodies.
- C. God comes into the garden, finds them in their new state, and hands down punishments for their disobedience. Consider how both birth and life are affected by their disobedience.
- 1) *"He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children with painful effort."* (**Genesis 3:16**)
 - 2) *"And he said to the man, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it': The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust."* (**Genesis 3:17-19**)
- D. Adam and Eve are subsequently expelled from the garden and no longer have access to the tree of life which would eventually lead to their bodily deaths, and Adam's death is indeed recorded in **Genesis 5:5**, *"So Adam's life lasted 930 years; then he died."* They had everything needed was given to them by God in the garden, and yet they failed to obey God and reap the benefit of life.
- E. Brethren, I will suggest to you that it was not God's desire for Adam to die, and it has not been His desire for any one of His children to die. But worse than our bodily death is certainly the spiritual death we incur when we rebel against God and sin. This death is the same that Adam and Eve experienced with their disobedience to God, and it continues to plague mankind's existence. It continues to wage war against God's desires for birth and life. And yet, the Bible will go on from the Genesis and garden accounts to show us that God was not ready to stop fighting for men to experience the blessings of birth and life. The Author of birth and life in **Genesis 1,2** was only getting started with these two things as centerpiece themes to His revealed Word.

III. The rest of the Bible continually echoes God's efforts to restore life to mankind, and ultimately the goal is to do so through Jesus Christ the Messiah.

- A. In just a moment, we will look at how birth and life were key themes in the life of Abraham, but before we get there...let's quickly remember that the horrible affects of sin continue to be present among the peoples of the earth. **Genesis 6:1-7** details the depths of mankind's depravity, and it causes God to decide to destroy the earth with water. Their hearts' inclinations were only upon sin, and God could not allow for it to stand. Thankfully, Noah and his family found favor in God's sight because of his righteous and blameless life, and God delivered them from the flood by His blessing them with the command and means to maintain their lives through the building of the ark. Notice that though the world died because of their sin...the earth was re-birthed through the flood, and life continued on through Noah & his descendants.

- B. God continued to preserve just enough life in order for His plans to continue to be carried out. The major centerpiece to these plans would find their fruition in the man Abraham. God comes to Abraham in **Genesis 12** and this begins a continual pattern of God birthing a new people and preserving life that would eventually lead to the introduction of the Messiah into the world.
- 1) Through Abraham, God would bring into existence a new people known as the Hebrews/Jews, and these people would be the lineage through which the Messiah would come. (**Genesis 12:1-3**)
 - 2) Yet, there was a problem...Abraham was already old along with his wife, and worst off was the fact that she was barren. (**Genesis 11:30; 15:1-3**) Yet, that which was dead God made to be made alive and it allowed for the son of promise, Isaac, to be brought into this world, and that lineage of the Messiah continued on. (**Genesis 21:1-3**)
 - 3) From Isaac would come Jacob, and from Jacob would be his twelve sons. Joseph would eventually be sold into slavery in Egypt, and yet God was with him because he was a righteous man. He rose to power which allowed for his family to have a place to settle once a famine arose in their own land. God's providence allowed for Abraham's lineage to live on. (**Genesis 37-50**)
 - 4) Unfortunately, the Hebrews were eventually oppressed in Egypt and the thought is that they might not survive. However, God was with them, and He eventually delivers them from Egypt and brings them into the land of promise that would again provide for them everything they needed to survive and thrive as God's people if they would commit themselves faithfully to Him through the Covenant of Moses. (**Exodus-Joshua**)
 - 5) Sadly, the same patterns of rebellion continued in these people and God continually struggled with them in their unfaithfulness. Though they were led by judges, prophets, and kings who were supposed to lead them towards God, these leaders often led the people further from God, and the Lord repeatedly punishes them through the oppression and even captivity of the nations. Yet, God always was sure to keep a small portion of His people alive so that the lineage of the Messiah would continue on, and His people would eventually return to their homeland where the Messiah would be born. (**Judges-Prophets**)
- C. The themes of birth and life are most certainly seen in the introduction of the Messiah Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. God introduces the Messiah through the avenue of birth by a woman. *"The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly. But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* (**Matthew 1:18-21**) Why do so many people, especially this time of year, care so much about the birth of Jesus? It isn't just that we love the whole idea of birth and new life being introduced, but it must be because so many recognize the significance of such a birth! He was birthed and He lived as a man so that the rest of mankind could live. This is the greatest echo of God's authorship of birth and life that we can find within the Scriptures. God's plan was right on course.

IV. Through Jesus, all men have the ability to be born again and have new life.

- A. During Jesus's ministry as recored in **John 3**, He has a very powerful conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. This man knew that there was something extremely special about Jesus, and he just had had to find out more. He had to know what this man was all about. He goes to Jesus by night and inquires to Jesus concerning what He was all about. Jesus's answer left Nicodemus confused. *"Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"* (**John 3:3**)

- B. Nicodemus responded in a way that seems rational to any reasonable person. *“How can anyone be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked Him. ‘Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?’” (John 3:4)* Again, can we recognize that this would probably throw just about anyone off? But Jesus clarifies His statement about this second birth. *“Jesus answered, ‘Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.’” (John 3:5,6)*
- C. Jesus’s point is understood in this way...It isn’t that men must be born again in a fleshly way, but we must be born again in a spiritual sense. We are dead in our trespasses and sins as a result of the opportunity to sin provided by Adam all the way back in the Genesis account. **(Romans 5:12-15)** But God’s Messiah was sent to rectify once and for all the problem of sin and the death that is incurred because of it. The solution? Men need to be born again to a new life through the One whose whole purpose in coming was to give grace & life and to counteract the curse of Adam! **(Romans 5:18-21)** How was Jesus able to do such a thing? Surely it was through another echo of God’s birth and life in Jesus being raised or birthed from the grave and living again! **(Matthew 28:1-6)** This is the birth and life that we seek to imitate in this life in Christ.
- D. How exactly are we raised or birthed to new life in Jesus? Paul describes it so aptly in **Romans 6:1-11**. *“What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? 2 Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, 7 since a person who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him, 9 because we know that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will not die again. Death no longer rules over him. 10 For the death he died, he died to sin once for all time; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*
- E. Through being born again in Christ, we all now have the opportunity to have life anew, and it is now our responsibility to not waste this life by living as we used to live apart from Christ. We are to now live differently in Christ Jesus because of our rebirth and new life in Him. *“Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: **You should no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thoughts. They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more. But that is not how you came to know Christ, assuming you heard about Him and were taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth. Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. Be angry and do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, and don’t give the devil an opportunity. Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. And don’t grieve God’s Holy Spirit. You were sealed by Him for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ. (Ephesians 4:25-32)***

V. This is all leading towards our resurrection from the dead to eternal life with God.

- A. God extended a new birth and life through Jesus to us so that we might be ultimately redeemed in that last day through the final echo of birth and life that will be seen within mankind. This ultimate echo is certainly that of resurrection or birth from the dead to be raised to eternal life with God our Father. This is the ultimate hope that we have in living for Jesus in this life. We sacrifice to do such a thing because we all hope to live with Him eternally.
- B. Again, Paul has an excellent description of this echo of birth and life in **I Corinthians 15:50-57**. *“What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption. Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. For this corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body must be clothed with immortality. When this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place: **Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting?** The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”*
- C. That victory is most certainly given through Jesus who Himself was birth and given life on two different occasions into this world. This however will be our third and final birth and life, and a perfect life it most certainly will be. We began this lesson with the Eden scene where paradise was experienced with God, and we will end with such a scene being renewed forevermore as described in **Revelation 22:1-5**. *“Then he showed me the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the city’s main street. The tree of life was on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, and there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.”*

I cannot even begin to imagine a better existence than one where the curse of sin is no more. To live in a world where death does not exist is something far beyond our comprehension, and yet that is exactly what God is moving us towards. Through His continual efforts of giving birth and life, we are moving towards our final birth on that final day and eternal life with God to follow. May we all live this life as a people who have been raised from our sins and given new life through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What a beautiful and glorious thought that is eternal life, and it is all made possible through our loving heavenly Father who is the Author of birth and life.