

Tour 1 Themes

Tour 1 Themes & Further Study

Introduction

Before moving forward on our quest to gaze upon the Crown Jewel in the nature of God, we need to cast a backward glance at the past. We cannot understand who we are, why we are here, and what our purpose is in this, the fourth epoch of God's Meta-Narrative – the epoch of Engagement – without first knowing something about the three epochs that went before: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. In God's timing, we hope to produce a follow-up series to The Engagement Project, which will be about the last epoch, Restoration. During this first Tour we will set our sights on the epoch of Creation and ask ourselves what God had in mind when He made the world. What is the true endgame of His creative act? Why did He make the universe in the first place? If we can gain a handle on this, we'll begin to get a picture of where the Larger Story is headed.

Themes

During the course of this episode Dr. Tackett reiterates one key thought: God did not create the universe and the creatures in it merely to “look good.” Because of who He is – the Great Prime Mover and Grand Creator par excellence – He designed the sun, the moon, and the stars, the plants, birds, fishes, animals, and people that inhabit the earth, to imitate Him and reflect His nature by becoming creative agents themselves. To each and every one of them, in one way or another, He has given the charge, “Be fruitful and multiply.” This is how He was thinking as far back as the Garden of Eden. His ultimate purpose in everything He has done – the endgame towards which His creativity is tending even to this day – is the proliferation and cultivation of teeming, flourishing, abundant life. The goal at which He is aiming can be summed up in a single word: fruit.

God could have replenished the earth by eternally renewing His initial creative act. He could have gone on doing this second by second, moment by moment, day after day, and eon after eon, world without end. But He didn't. Instead, He opted to bring His creatures into the loop. He chose to grant them a participatory role in the propagation of life. He created, equipped, chose, appointed, and sent them into the world for one reason: to be fruitful after their kind. More than this, because He is the triune God who exists in Three Persons – the God of relationship, interaction, and deep, abiding love – He designed this creative process to function relationally. He made the world in such a way that nothing can “be fruitful and multiply” on its own. All reproduction, regeneration, and re-creation take place within a context of community.

This is as true of the Body of Christ as it is of any physical body. God designed His Church to grow, reproduce itself, and bear fruit by way of communal participation. Jesus could have remained on earth after His resurrection to conduct the work of “bringing many sons to glory” all by Himself. But He didn't. Instead, He ascended into heaven and sent His spirit into the hearts of believers, so that, through their living and abiding connection with Him, they might play an active role in the process of cultivating and propagating abundant, flourishing spiritual life. That's why Jesus left. That's why we're still here. And that's what we're supposed to be doing in this present epoch of Engagement.

Points to Watch For

Dr. Tackett launches this discussion by posing an intriguing question: Why did Jesus curse the fig

tree (Mark 11:12-25)? He returns to this question later in the Tour to underscore the thought that the fig tree, like all the other trees in the Garden of Eden, was not created simply to “look good.” Its purpose was to bear fruit. Because the fig tree in this particular story was barren of fruit, Christ took the drastic step of terminating it. The message of this “acted parable” is stark and simple: fruit is a serious issue in the eyes of God. We are not saved by our works, but we are saved by grace in order to do good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). God wants to achieve His goals through us.

Other key ideas to keep in mind: Truth, indispensable though it may be, is nevertheless not God’s endgame. Neither is my salvation, my abiding in Christ, or my personal relationship (Unio Mystica) with the Lord Jesus. All of these aspects of the Christian life have a single end in view: fruitfulness. The believer’s purpose in this life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (The Westminster Catechism), and this can be accomplished in only one way: by “bearing much fruit” (John 15:8). Christianity, says Dr. Tackett, is not meant to be “all about me” (“Meo-Christianity”). Instead, it drives its adherents to cultivate flourishing life. It causes them to become a rich blessing to others (Genesis 12:2, 3). Like the Dead Sea in southern Judea, a Christian life that makes no provision for this kind of outward flow eventually grows stagnant and dies.

Questions:

1. **At this point in the discussion, how would you answer the first of our three Guiding Questions: *Why did Jesus leave?*** (In John 14:12 Jesus says, “He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to My Father.” This is God’s plan for the fruitfulness of the Body of Christ. Jesus’ ascent to the Father has made possible the “descent of the Dove” and the indwelling of every disciple by the power of the Holy Spirit. By means of this empowerment God impacts the world on a much wider scale than ever before. It was this broader influence that Jesus had in mind when He spoke of the “greater works” that His followers would do.)
2. **What are some of the different ways in which God expects us to “be fruitful and multiply” as creatures made in His image and called to “provoke the fruitfulness” of His creation?** ([1] Physical fruitfulness: in other words the fruit of the womb. This is something God expects of all His creatures [Genesis 1:28]. [2] Vocational fruitfulness: as we discovered in The Truth Project, our labor matters to God. The quality of the work we do in our so-called “secular” occupations, and the diligence with which we carry it out, are important within the context of His kingdom. [3] Ministerial Fruitfulness: one of the most important doctrines of the New Testament is the Priesthood of All Believers. “You are a chosen generation,” writes the apostle Peter, “a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” [1 Peter 2:9]. A priest serves as an intercessor between God and His people. In Christ, all of us have been charged with this sacred task. It is not the sole prerogative of “professional” ministers and pastors.)
3. **What are the three S’s of the serpent’s “Hisss”, and how do they block the outward flow of fruitfulness and blessing in our lives?** ([1] Skepticism. It was the serpent who planted doubts in Eve’s mind by asking, “Has God really said ...?” (Genesis 3:1). If we question the validity of Jesus’ injunction to move outward into the lives of others, we will have no motivation to engage the world for Christ. [2] Selfishness. This is probably the main reason we resist doing what God has asked us to do: His commands make us uncomfortable because they don’t always fit in with our own agenda and “script.” [3] Significance. “Eat of the fruit,” said the serpent to the woman, “and you will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). We cannot become fruitful until we are willing to

abandon our desire to be the “star of the show.” We have to be willing to say, “It’s not all about me.” The ambition to become our own endgame quenches the work of God’s Spirit in our hearts and prevents Him from accomplishing His will through us.)

4. **Deep space is a place of incredible beauty, but, as far as we know, it is completely devoid of life. Based on the principles articulated in this Tour, why do you think this is the case? What does this suggest to us as followers of Jesus and creatures who have been charged to “be fruitful and multiply”?** (Despite its awesome beauty, deep space is, for the most part, an empty void. There is “no man” there [Genesis 2:5] to cultivate it and “provoke its fruitfulness.” In all the unending reaches of its interstellar vastness, there is no opportunity for relationship, community, or creative give-and-take. As a result, there is no potential for fruitfulness. Implication: we cannot carry out the mission Jesus has entrusted to us without becoming profoundly relational people.)
5. **What is the point of Dr. Tackett’s illustration of the “lead horse”? What does he have in mind when he says, “You are not just a dumb animal”?** (Lead horses instinctively assume the responsibility of scanning the trail ahead and picking out a path for the herd that comes behind. The rest of the horses mindlessly follow along. Dr. Tackett’s point in this illustration is that we, as Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus, are something more – something much more – than mindless followers. God wants us to function as lead horses, each and every one of us. We have been given the exciting and stimulating job of coming up with creative and innovative strategies for impacting the world around us with the power of God’s love. We are called to love God with “all our heart, soul, mind, and strength,” and this means taking the initiative to step into the “good works which He prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” [Ephesians 2:10].)