

“God’s Goal. God’s Risk. God’s Problem.” Part 2

Ron Simkins, New Covenant Fellowship - July 31, 2022

00:03 Hello New Covenant and friends far and near. This is Ron Simkins. Good to be with you.

00:09 Teaching today is part two of my teaching: "God's Goal, God's Problem, God's Risk."

00:19 Last week the teaching went through the claims in Genesis that we humans are God's goal. Not because God had to create us, but because God wanted to create us. God wanted to create a community of sons and daughters of humans made in the image of God, male and female. But also, as we looked at Genesis, we realize Genesis was telling us that we're not only God's goal and the way God works toward God's goal as co-laborers, but we're also, as humans, God's problem, and the source of many of God's great heartbreaks.

00:57 Both the systems we create and as individuals making choices, we very often hurt God, hurt each other, damage the creation, damage ourselves, and prove to be God's great risk of heartbreak. Nevertheless, Genesis says God chooses not to give up, but to continue moving toward God's goal and tells Abraham, Sarah, that he promises in covenants to keep moving toward that goal to bless all nations through their seed. Of course, if you keep reading in Genesis, Abraham and Sarah aren't only God's next step in determining that he's going to have a community and keep working toward the goal. They also themselves become part of God's problem, God's heartbreak.

01:50 We could have continued, and could continue today, all through the Old Testament. When you read the prophets, what's clear is Israel is God's chosen, elected, selected, new creation of people that weren't a people to be a blessing to all nations. And yet, Israel of prophets, they were also God's problem, God's great heartbreak. Or we can look at individuals in the Old Testament, such as David who is God's next step in the covenant that "your sons will be my sons, I will bring someone who will bless the whole earth." And then look at David's absolute, breaking God's heart in what he did in murdering Uriah and others, and wanting to steal Bathsheba, his wife.

02:41 But I'd rather just skip to the New Testament. So today, let's think a bit about the New Testament. It tells us that Jesus comes into the world as God's next step toward God's great goal. And Jesus is faithful at all cost, and he doesn't become God's problem. And he doesn't become the heartbreaker of God's heart. So through him, God can create a new thing, the reason Jesus becomes the first completed human, Hebrews says, or the first glorified human, Paul says in Philippians 2 and 3. And many people thought then that when the Messiah came, God's problems, and God's heartbreaks, and our problems and our heartbreaks, would be over. I think if we're honest, many of us still think that should be true. Or at least we wish it was true. But Jesus certainly knew better himself. In fact, right before his crucifixion, in Mark 13, we're told that Jesus gathered His disciples together and said, "Look, the future holds many wars, many famines, many rotten political and religious leaders and it also will include you suffering, sometimes being ostracized, some of you will even be imprisoned." And not long before being arrested, Jesus one time looked around and said, "Well," this is in Luke 18, per se, "God's gonna keep working toward justice in human history. But I wonder, when the Son of Man comes back, is he gonna find any trust on Earth at all?" Or you could just think about Jesus' empirical experience. After hanging out with those closest followers for about three years, yes, he apprenticed them to be God's next step toward God's goal of blessing all nations, but you don't really think that Jesus was so naive to think that suddenly these people, who had been with for three years and knew their warts and their brokenness and who had often broken his heart, were suddenly going to just quickly become absolutely perfect to make no more mistakes.

04:59 No, he didn't, and the New Testament is honest, they didn't. This new community of Jesus' followers, these individuals who would receive as a community and as individuals, an outpouring of God's spirit that was new and a new creation. They become God's co-laborers toward the goal of blessing all nations. They do so as community. They do so as individuals. They also become God's problem. And God's heartbreak. And thankfully, the New Testament's very honest about this.

05:38 Let's just look for a few minutes at how how this is recorded in the Book of Acts.

05:41 Acts makes it very clear that this new community is the source of God's new acts. Next step toward God's great goal of blessing all nations, the Holy Spirit's poured out, that community becomes a place of sharing of time, sharing of home, sharing of food, sharing resources, sharing the Good News, sharing of growth and learning. The community even begins to spread out toward God's goal of blessing all nations through the seed of Abraham. But this new community, quote "The Church," and these sons and daughters of God also become God's problem and the source of many heartbreaks for God.

06:28 Just think for a few moments about Acts with me. Acts 1: Jesus tells the disciples to wait until the Holy Spirit is poured out. And then Acts 1 tells us Peter didn't wait. He gathers everyone together, decides they ought to add an apostle to replace Judas, they cast lots and he quotes a scripture for justifying doing so. Now Luke doesn't say, Peter was wrong or that they were wrong. But Luke does say in Acts 9, who God chose to be the next apostle: it was a man named Saul.

07:09 When you got to Acts 4, this wonderful shared life, these shared resources, these shared Good News, the shared delight of people just being willing to take what they have and make it available to each other tempts one couple to say, "Well, we sold our property for such-and-such full price," when really they're just keeping a lot of it from themselves. Now the keeping it was okay, but the lying wasn't because it would destroy the trust within the community.

07:48 Or Acts 6: the community begins to feel like the resources are getting scarce and so they began to favor those widows who are more truly, quote "like us." And they began sleighting those who don't speak, look, dress and think quite the same as the hometown people. Could have ruined everything.

08:13 Or we have Acts 10, where Peter has a vision from God that he's to cross the line and be willing to eat kosher food. He soon finds out why -- he's going to be invited to the home of a Gentile -- but his response three times is to say to God, "No way. I know my Bible. I love my culture, no way." If you contrast Cornelius, the pagan Centurion in the same chapter, he immediately does what God tells him to do in a vision. Who is it that's God's problem? Who is closest to breaking God's heart here? Peter.

08:55 And then we're told in Acts 11, that Peter comes to peace with what God did or at least partly to peace with it, but he's called on the carpet by the church leaders in Jerusalem for going staying, eating, sleeping in the home of a Gentile family. Definitely the church can be God's problem. And in Acts 15, it's Paul and Barnabas, who are called on the carpet by the church leaders and want to know what's happening with these gentiles who are becoming part of the community of Jesus without becoming Jewish. And then, as you get to the end of Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas, the very ones who had been so courageous, and had changed the minds even the whole church leaders in Jerusalem. They can't settle their differences about a man named John Mark. And so they divide and break up their team. Barnabas, who was the one who had even been responsible for Paul getting to really work within the community, now has to go off away from Paul because they can't work it out.

10:11 I could go on and on, but just to bring up one more thing. I was really taken by Renée's question a few weeks ago in her teaching. She was talking about the vision in Acts 16 where Paul had a vision of a man saying come over to Macedonia. And how he and his team got together and talked and prayed and decided that that really was from God. And they should do it. Now we're told when they got there, who they met was not a man who they met was a God fearing, wealthy, gentile woman.

10:46 And Renée's question, would they have gone, if Paul's dream had been a woman inviting them to come? I don't know. But it's a good question. And I'm not sure the answer is yes. What I do know is that the entire early church, right up until today, has had a difficult time seeing females and males as equally in the image of God and equally gifted and co-laborers with God.

11:19 We've not only been God's way toward God's goal, we've been God's problem, God's heartbreak.

11:28 That's Acts. But we could just as easily have looked at the Epistles. Why was Corinthians written? First and Second Corinthians. Because not only are the Corinthian people, God's way, God's goal, they are also God's problem. Lots of problems. True. Second Corinthians 5:20 says, "We're ambassadors for the Messiah since God is making God's appeal through us. We treat others as you on behalf of the Messiah. Be reconciled to God." That's the calling. They're moving toward blessing all nations. At the same time, when you read the Corinthian letters, they are breaking God's heart in so many ways, hurting each other, hurting others.

12:20 You could do the same with Galatians. Romans. ****glitch**** from James. Why are they written? They're written because God's people are also God's problem. And often God's heartbreak.

12:34 I think it's absolutely necessary for us as Jesus' followers, to acknowledge that we continue to be part of a community that is called to co-labor with God and be a blessing to all people. But that we're also a community, New Covenant, wider church, tribes and nations of the world, could be entities that are God's problem and often the source of God's current heartbreaks.

13:17 So again, this week, I'd like to just give you a few moments to contemplate, "Am I willing for God to show us as community, as a church? How we're God's problem, how we sometimes break God's heart, how we could do better. How we could be healed. Am I as an individual willing to let God show me how I'm being God's problem, sometimes breaking God's heart. Give you a few moments, to pray and reflect. I hope you'll continue doing so after this time. *[pause for reflection]*

14:22 Then I'd also like for us to take a few moments to celebrate. To celebrate the fact that, though that's true, we are God's problem, we are often the source of God's heartbreak; we are also God's co-laborers, working toward God's future, God's goal for humanity. God's work of art, God's prized treasure. That God values us as community and as individuals, not more than we value ourselves. I like to begin that celebration by just listening to a few of the passages in the New Testament, that make this claim, that this promise.

15:08 Ephesians, 1:13 and 14. "And you also were included in the Messiah, when you heard the message of truth, the good news of your salvation. When you trusted, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who's a down payment, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, or God's most prized treasure, which will be to the praise of God's glory."

15:51 Incredible promise that what we experience is just a taste of what is coming and that we are God's most prized treasure.

16:05 Ephesians 2:8-10. "You're saved by God's grace because of your trust. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God's accomplishment." That word could be translated, masterpiece, God's work of art. We are God's work of art, created in Jesus the Messiah, to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

16:50 Romans 8:14 and following. "All who are led by God's spirit are God's sons and daughters. You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back into fear. You received the Spirit that shows you're adopted as God's children. With this spirit, we cry, Abba, Father. The same spirit agrees with our spirit. We are God's children. But if we're children, we're also God's heirs. And we're God's heirs and we're fellow heirs with the Messiah, if we really suffer with Him, so that we can also be glorified with Him. I trust that the present suffering is nothing compared to

the coming glory that's going to be revealed in us. The whole creation waits breathlessly with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and God's daughters."

17:59 1 Peter 2:9. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people that are God's very own prized treasure, God's possession. You've become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness and into God's amazing light. Once you weren't a people, now you are God's people, once you hadn't received mercy, now you have received mercy.

18:40 Hebrews 2:10-11. "It was appropriate for God, for whom and through whom all things exist, to use experiences of suffering to make complete the pioneer of our salvation. This salvation belongs to many sons and daughters of Gods leading to glory. This is because the one who makes people holy and the people who are being made holy, all come from one source. That's why Jesus isn't ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters."

19:21 Those are just a few of the many times that the New Testament writers claim that we, despite the fact that we are often God's problem and God's heartbreak, are nonetheless God's prized possessions, God's masterpiece. God is working toward a future that is beyond our imagination. And God wants to bless all nations through this community, through us as his daughters and sons and bring us toward the goal of a forever human family. sons and daughters of God forever. Just have a few moments of quiet to reflect on this great grace. Let it sink in. We. You. Those around you right now. I God's prize stranger because of masterpiece God's work of art and definitely God's not done with us yet. We're valued beyond our wildest imagination. *[pause for prayer]*

21:11 Amen. I hope that you will continue that reflection and that prayer. God bless.