

The Long Walk Home

Genesis 5:21-24

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Sunday, September 2, 2001

[Real Audio \(3 MB\)](#)

On the journey through this life, we are tempted to think that the most important thing is how far we get. But it is not. The most important thing is learning to walk with God.

It is amazing how much movement there is in the Bible. From the time Adam and Eve leave the Garden of Eden they and their descendants start walking around and right up to the closing lines of the New Testament no one ever settles down for long. It is always when people stop moving around that they get in so much trouble with God. Then they stop praying, stop taking risks, and stop living by faith. All of which is a way of telling God just to leave us alone because we want to settle into the life that we think is good enough. But it's not good enough for God, and not even good enough for us.

This is one of the reasons Jesus keeps calling people to leave home to follow him. The point of life is not to settle. The point is to know God, and God is on the move through history. Thus, to know him you have to keep moving. You have to walk with God.

I hope this theme of walking with God resonates with you because I am going to spend the entire year preaching on it. Today we begin with the brief story of Enoch who is the abiding symbol of what it means to walk with God.

When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah. (Becoming a father when you're 65 is enough to make you start walking with God if you haven't begun already.) Enoch walked with God so long that eventually they got closer to God's home than Enoch's. So one day God said, "Why don't you just come on home with me." Or as the text says, "And Enoch was no more because God took him."

This is the goal of everything that the church is about -- to help you get to your true home with God. The thing that makes heaven, our ultimate home, so wonderful is that God is there. But you can know his presence today while you are still on the journey. So we can more accurately say that the goal of the church's ministry is to help you be at home with God while you are still on the way. That is what we will spend the year trying to understand.

We meet Enoch in a genealogical list of ten names that connect Adam to Noah. All ten of these successive families live outside the Garden, East of Eden, in a world that is going from bad to worse. Cain's murder of his brother has unleashed violence and greed in the world. Soon, it's clear that all ten of these families are living a long way from paradise because most of them made the terrible choice of taking the violence and greed to heart. By the time we get to Noah, God is sorry that he even created humanity.

When you read through this genealogy in Genesis, chapter five, two things appear striking. The first is that they all lived very long lives--most made it 900 years. The second thing that is striking is that none of them do anything remarkable. There are no notations next to their names. It is remarkable how unremarkable they are with 900 years of opportunity. That's why at the end of the list God decides that this experiment with longevity is a bad idea (6:3). More years is not necessarily better years. In fact, it just gives us too much time to get in big trouble. As the text says, "Every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (6:5). The exception to this is Enoch. He's the seventh generation from Adam. When the genealogy gets to his name, it stops for the first time to make a very remarkable comment: "Enoch walked with God."

Like Enoch we too were born into a world that has wandered a long way from paradise. Violence and greed are still running rampant. The hearts of those around us, and maybe our own hearts, are plagued by evil or the hurt it causes. The snake that tempted Adam and Eve to sin seems some days to be the only

creature that took seriously God's command to multiply. The snakes are all around us. You may live among snakes. You may have been raised by a snake, or work with snakes. You may even work for a snake. So it is very tempting to think you have to be a snake to survive. But you are not a snake. You are created in the image of God, which means you have the choice to walk like a human being. And to be truly human is to walk with God.

When you choose to walk with God, you discover that you also have choices about how you will live. The devil cannot make you do anything. It cannot make you settle for living in an evil world, and it cannot make you settle for the evil that is in your own heart. It doesn't matter how compromised or entangled you get with evil, you still have choices. The devil can only tempt you to be afraid that you do not.

When I was a boy walking to school, I dreaded passing this one house that had a huge, ferocious dog under the porch. When it saw me get right in front of the house, the dog would charge at me, growling and barking with foam coming out of its mouth. When it got to me, it would lunge for my throat jumping up with all four paws in the air. But then it was like it hit a force field. It would stop in mid air and fall back on its head whimpering without even touching me. That's because the dog was leashed. Every day we would go through this terrifying little routine. But it never got me.

The devil is leashed. It can scare you, but it cannot hurt you. It won't help to act like a crazed dog yourself. You don't have to bark at those who scare you, or get tough and mean and foam at the mouth. You can act like a human being. But only if you pay attention to the God who is beside you.

This image of walking with God is that of communion, intimacy, and even friendship. Thomas Aquinas, the greatest theologian of the Middle Ages, claimed that the purpose of all his theology was to help humans live as the friend of God. He wrote, "We can be, and are called to be, and must be the friends of God. That is what our life is--a life of ever-deepening friendship with God." As with any ever-deepening friendship, along the way, we discover more about God and in the process discover more about ourselves.

Many of us, I know, are uncomfortable speaking of God as a friend with whom we walk, and are more accustomed to other theological models. Some prefer the duty model where God does nothing more than give us our orders: "Just walk past the mad dogs by yourself and get it right this time." Others prefer the security model where God magically makes the mad dogs go away. Good luck with that. Still others prefer the judgment model where God makes you angry at the mad dogs. So they aren't allowed to come to your church, and you can even get judgmental yourself telling them that they are all going to hell. But there is nothing remarkable about these forms of religion. If you really want to be distinctive in the great genealogy of history, if you really want your life to stand out like Enoch's does, then let history remember you as a man or woman who was the friend of God.

Now, this is no ordinary friend who wants to walk with you. God is triune. That means that in the three persons of the Trinity, God already enjoys all the love he needs. So it isn't because God is lonely that he walks beside you. Rather, by the Spirit God freely adopts you into the love of the Triune communion. It is not his need, but his delight that motivates God to befriend you. Finally, you have a friend who is not needy and who walks beside you out of sheer delight.

Is this not at the core of the story of Jesus? God was so delighted in you that in Christ he came to find you and walk beside you. He went to the cross to forgive you of all the things you did when you acted like a snake or a mad dog. He rose from the dead that you too may rise to a whole new life where you are at home with God.

When we read in the Gospels about this Son of God, we discover that people are constantly amazed by him. They were amazed by his teaching and amazed by his miracles. But most of all, they were amazed by his identity. In Jesus Christ, as the disciples slowly discovered, God has become flesh to be with us. He was fully God and fully human.

When you realize this, it changes everything about you. The more you walk with Jesus Christ, the more you start to look just like him. You too become fully human, as you were created to be from the beginning. Amazing. And as Jesus was fully the Son of God, so do you become the beloved of the Father. That means

your life is not your own. You belong to this God who is beside you.

In the words of C.S. Lewis, "Faith begins not in comfort, but in dismay." You have God beside you! Think about that when you are making choices this week. Think about it when you are driving, and working, and caring for children. Think about it through all the ordinary routines that are made extraordinary by the presence of God.

Think about the God who is walking beside you when you confront your limitations this week. We are told that "Enoch walked with God, and he was no more," or as a literal translation of the Hebrew states, "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." When you are not... there is still a God who takes you, and chooses you as a friend. When you are not certain, God will still take you because he is certain. When you are not healthy or strong, God will still take you because he is whole and complete enjoying all the strength of heaven and earth. When you are not employed, God will still take you because he doesn't need your achievements anyway. And when you are not in a happy home, God will still take you because he has another home waiting for you.

God doesn't take you because you are doing so well at life all by yourself. He takes you into his triune, perfect love because he delights in you. By grace, in Jesus Christ he found you. By grace, in the Spirit he still walks beside you even when you try to run away. And by grace, you will be brought home to the Father who calls you his own beloved.

In the meantime, your calling is to be amazed by all the grace you have received along the way in the journey. It will change everything about you. It will make you grateful, and only grateful people do remarkable things.

Take us, O God. Take all of our lives, and change us into a people whose great delight is to walk a little closer beside you along the way. In the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.