

Sermon: Hard to believe don't be deceived?

Reading: Genesis 1:1-5

Introduction.

Today I want to speak about deceptions. One of the first things Jesus warned us about when we are in the end times is not to be deceived as many will fall for the lie and the deceptions in those days. To deceive is defined as deliberately causing someone to believe something that is not true, especially for personal gain. Other words associated with deception include, swindle, cheat, trick, hoodwink, hoax and dupe.

Deception is nothing new, there have always been those who set out to deceive others for personal gain, position or power. Walter Scott in his poem, Marmion: A tale of Flooded Field, wrote, 'O what a tangled web we weave when we first set out to deceive'. I take this to mean, when we lie or act dishonestly we are initiating problems and building a house of cards whose structure becomes more and more unstable the more we build on the deception and so the lies and dishonesty have to become more and more elaborate. Eventually the deception runs out of control and will reach a tipping point when the whole stack of cards comes tumbling down.

Deceptions are designed to manipulate and fool others into believing a lie. We have probably all fallen victim at some point to a deception and how foolish we feel when we discover we have been duped when the truth is revealed. Deceptions can come in many guises and styles, here are three deceptions which came in pots.....

Pot Noodles are a delicious and healthy snack!

Potpourri transforms our living rooms with a gentle fragrance!

Potage is worth your birthright! (**Gen 25:29-34**).

The first two pots are just tongue in cheek, but Esau however gives us an insight into how easy it is to be deceived. His rash decision for personal gain shows us how easy it is to be duped as he gave up his birthright for a bowl of lentils. When we see something that seems to benefit us in a personal way and is seen as a gain either materially or physically and our eye is focussed on the gain we are more likely to fall for the deception. Jesus warns us to be careful that we are not deceived in the end days, for many will. It appears there will be a global deception which many will believe and will ultimately lead to ruin.

It seems almost ironic that the world will be deceived in the end times ushering in the end of the world's history, just as the world's problems began with a deception at the very beginning. Eve fell for the deception of the ancient serpent, Satan who were duped into believing they could be like God. This hoax has had major repercussions around the world ever since.

Genesis the Book

Did you know of all of the books in Scripture the first book, Genesis is the one book that has been challenged, mocked and attempts to discredit it more often than any of the others. Sadly even in some of our mainstream churches Genesis is not taken seriously and has been relegated to tales and fables, myths and legends, allegory and poetry. Churches are content to teach Genesis to children as there are many great stories but we hardly ever hear Genesis preached with true conviction from our pulpits today. Think about this, if Genesis is poetry using allegory have you ever read chapter 5 of Genesis? Does this read like poetry or would you say it was history? In attempts to reconcile the book of Genesis which speaks of the origins of the world, life and evil preachers and teachers have attempted to find a middle road which aligns more closely with

contemporary atheistic sciences. (I say atheistic science as there are many scientists who believe in Creation). The arguments for the origins of the world and life within it are complex and at times confusing. But when we strip away all of the layers it really comes down to two main possibilities which are as follows.....

1. God created the heavens and the earth and made everything within it giving life. And He made us in His image, male and female He made them.
or
2. The world came into being through random chance, naturalism, and evolutionary processes.

Battle for minds

A deception which has been permeated amongst the young today is faith and science are not compatible, they are seen as opposing but this is not the case. The Christian faith is the pursuit of truth, Jesus Himself said, I am the way and the Truth and the Life (John 14). The ninth Commandment of God is do not lie, bear false witness. Truth is at the heart of our faith.

A definition of science says this, 'Knowledge about the natural world that is based on facts learned through experiments and observation. Aa area of study that deals with the natural world (biology or physics). (Definition from the science council website).

Both faith and science are in search for truth and will either build on a solid foundation that will last even when storms come against it or if its built on faulty premise (sand) when the storm comes the house will totter and fall. This goes for a misunderstanding of Genesis and of science. Its important to say at this point I am not suggesting those who believe in atheistic sciences are deliberately setting out to deceive, I would say atheistic sciences and theologians are looking at the same evidence but drawing different conclusions from the position we are standing in. Both conclusions cannot be right as they are travelling in opposing directions. Some would argue this is a good reason for the middle road approach of Theistic evolution! This middle road may sound like we can hold the tensions of secular science and Scripture together but we must be careful as one commentator remarked, if we wed contemporary science today, we will be a widow tomorrow when science changes its position again as it discovers more. The Scripture does not allow for the middle road, this is why Genesis becomes a controversial book within church communities and many prefer to avoid the debate and focus instead on that which unites not divides! It has been this approach which has led to many walking away from belief in God and aligning themselves with the atheistic science positions as the church has failed to answer the questions which many have been asking and still desire to know.

Hypothetically Speaking

Speaking hypothetically now, if you were as cunning as Satan and you wanted to destroy God's creation and His people what would be a top priority for your attack, how would you corrupt and deceive the world?

Would you create word leaders and super rich who deceive millions as they pursue the deception of what wealth and power can bring?

Would you deceive many into abusing substances and create addicts who ruin not only their own lives but families and whole communities as they crave and desire their next fix?

Would you keep many distracted and busy with entertainment, TV, recreation, video games etc and feed the interest in celebrity news?

These are all effective but surely the greatest threat to Satan's eternal security is not the world as he already has them in his hands. The prime target of focus surely would be to target and undermine the very one who threatens his security - attacking those things which Jesus is connected to.

1. Would you not target what Jesus loves
2. Would you not distract His people and keep them from His mission.
3. Would you not undermine and discredit His word, foster doubt

1. What does Jesus love?

That's easy to answer for He gave up His very life for Her - Israel and the church, His people, (not an ethnic group nor denomination). What better way to foster an intolerance against the people of God and Israel. Have you noticed how much harder it's becoming to hold Scriptural views not just in our church and communities but also globally. The church has always been persecuted across the world and it's increasing.

Surely a great strategy would be to infiltrate the churches with your own people, those who will abuse others, confuse them with false teachings and keep them distracted with so many policies and social activities we forget what we are called to be. Sowing tares amongst the wheat would be a good strategy. **(Matt 13:25)**.

2. Jesus Mission

We are commissioned by Jesus to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations **(Matt 28)**. Why does it feel like the church is so reluctant to share the good news about Jesus and His offer of salvation? Many have lost confidence in the Scriptures and the questions which are generated by Genesis need to be answered. Many have become armchair Christians and have decided to opt in when it's convenient. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of the seventh day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship and ministry in harmony with the practice of Jesus. Our Sabbath is important and should be seen as a delight as it's sacred to the Lord and a day when we gather to break bread together as Jesus commanded.

Lets us consider the following scriptures to ensure we are not being deceived.....

Not ceasing to meet **(Heb 10:24-25)** for biblical fellowship **(Col 3:16)**, for public reading of Scripture **(1 Tim 4:13)**, breaking bread together **(Acts 2:42)**.

3. Undermining God's word

It's the oldest deception which is recorded in chapter 3 of Genesis and so effective is this deception Satan still employs it today. Remember the old adage, if it's not broke then don't fix it. This strategy is so effective, he still uses it. To what am I referring? See if these words sound familiar, 'Did God really say.....'

We have been distracted in our churches over issues to do with gender and sexuality, and when we listen to the debates and discussions we hear the words, Did God really say...."

In the book of Genesis we have answers to these questions, this is another reason why it's undermined and dismissed. However as Satan brought about Adam's fall from Paradise as he deceived Eve. Satan's attempt to deceive the world now centres on Genesis chapter 1, 'In the beginning God'.

In order to undermine this statement Satan has to provide an alternative account of origins and this is where the debate rages for there are only really two options as previously mentioned. Behind the design of creation is a great designer and creator or it all happened by random chance and natural processes of its own self guiding will!

In the beginning

The first words of Genesis are remarkable in their simplicity and introduces us to our Creator who is eternal for the word says, 'In the beginning God' **(Gen 1:1)**. Before anything was God was there. Before all of creation, God existed. He is the cause and effect of all things and through Him all things came into being **(Col 1:15)**. This is precisely where John the gospel writer places the feet of Jesus as he opens up his gospel mirroring these great

words, 'In the beginning was he Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' **(John 1:1)**.

The Scriptures from the outset, as soon as possible introduces us to the one who brought all of the worlds and universe into existence. as we read through the verses of this chapter we discover some intriguing facts about God

1. He exists eternally, **(Gen 1:1)**
2. He is a genius, an amazing designer and wonderful creator and sustainer **(Gen 1:5)**
3. He speaks **(Gen 1:3)**
4. He governs what He has made bringing order out of chaos **(Gen 1:1:2)**.
5. He weaves into the fabric of His creation laws and morality declaring 'It is good' **(1:10)**
6. He brings light, which banishes the darkness making all things visible and clear **(1:3)**
7. His creation has meaning and purpose for He designed it to be fruitful **(Gen 1:28)**

In order for Satan to discredit Chapter 1 of Genesis, he would not only have to offer an alternative view to the origins of the world but to maintain this stack of cards at all costs. As science understands more there are now many questions which are an embarrassment to the atheistic science community when we consider the evidence of the geology, biology, cosmology, macro evolution. This alternative position is the humanistic, atheistic, agnostic golden calf and apple of satan's eye.

To believe in a Creator behind the design of creation we also understand He has the first and last word on all things. He writes and sets the moral and physical laws (which the scientific community need to have predictable observational evidence for their theories) . If there is a law giver then we are bound to these laws and answerable to the one who set them. This is the main reason people prefer to believe the atheistic science views as they are no accountable to anyone - they can be their own gods! Does that sound familiar **(Genesis 3)**. As God designs and creates He has a divine purpose, for nothing is random with God, for He brings order from chaos. This provides us with hope, as it means life has meaning and purpose. There is meaning to your life and mine.

If we dismiss the creator and replace the creator with random chance, luck then there is no one in control, there is no one in the driving seat and the world is simply spinning without meaning or purpose except to maintain the food chain for the stronger species to survive. Without God there is no moral law, which means we are our own moral guides and therefore are not accountable to anyone other than ourselves. If life is just a set of random chances there is no purpose in life and no meaning and chaos will reign. The culture that places itself in the position of God creates its own truth, morality slides and descends rapidly into a society where anything is permissible.

Summary Jesus said, 'I Am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life' **(John 8:12)**. When there is light the deception is harder to pull off. Keep our eyes on Jesus and let Him guide our feet into the way of life.

Amen