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WILD AT HEART

On the last Saturday in February John Eldredge spoke in the sanctuary of our church at the invitation of “Warrior at Heart” ministries, which is a very big ministry in western Colorado. It says a lot about men’s hunger for Christ that over 1,400 men spent from 8:00 AM until Noon on a Saturday sitting in a church. Amazing! John’s first book, The Divine Romance, written with Brent Curtis, came out in 1997, and his second book, Wild at Heart, came out in 2001, and these books have been transformational for innumerable people around the world, and especially for men. After listening to John’s talk and going through his two books once again, I have concluded that we (the church) still, in many ways, don’t grasp John’s deep insights about God’s profound purpose in creating male and female. Some reflections: (I have mixed my own ideas with those of John Eldredge and am afraid you will think he is a really dumb guy.)

First, let me remind you that in our modern society there is a war on the Bible and a war on gender. In the March, 2014, issue of Charisma, Dr. Michael Brown writes: “What many believers do not realize is that there is not only a war on heterosexism (defined by the San Francisco Unified School District as ‘an overt or tacit bias against homosexuality rooted in the belief that heterosexuality is superior or the norm’). There is also a war on gender – on male-female distinctives and on the male-female dichotomy. As stated by lesbian sociology professor Barb Burdge, ‘The social construct of dividing humans into male and female is oppressive and should be rejected altogether.’ Newsweek magazine reported back in 1910 that “a small but growing number of people are rejecting being labeled male or female.”

Standard policy in Los Angeles schools states, “Gender identity refers to one’s understanding, interests, outlook and feeling about whether one is female or male, or both, or neither, regardless of one’s biological sex.” Therefore a prom queen can be a guy, etc. In the last two years, the state of California passed bills that 1) call for the mandatory celebration of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender history in America for all grades and districts, with no ability to opt out for parents or students; 2) make it illegal for a minor with unwanted same-sex attractions to get professional counseling and help, even with parental permission; and 3) give rights to a student in any grade who identifies as the opposite of his/her biological sex to use the bathroom of his/her choice, etc.

John says that Christianity, as it currently exists, has also done some terrible things to men and women. Most men in the church believe that God has put them on earth to be a good boy, and if they try real hard they can reach the lofty summit of becoming. . . a nice guy. That’s what we hold up as models of Christian maturity: Really Nice Guys. “We don’t smoke, drink, or chew, and we don’t go with girls who do.” Many men have tried for years to be what the church has held up to them as the goal for men, and they are . . . bored. John says that there are three desires written deeply in the heart of every man: **A battle to fight, An adventure to live, and A beauty to rescue.** I am not going to recapitulate all of John’s teaching, but consider the following:

God created mankind in the image of God, male and female he created them. By God’s design, it takes two distinctly different types of human to represent his personality. Men and women are different in every cell of their bodies. “How many parents have tried in vain to prevent little Timmy from playing with guns? Give it up. Every stick or fallen branch is a spear, or better, a bazooka. Despite what many modern educators would say, this is not a psychological disturbance brought on by violent television or chemical imbalance. Aggression and competition is part of the masculine design, we are hardwired for it. If we believe that man is made in the image of God, then we would do well to remember that ‘The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name.’ (Ex. 15:3)

Women didn’t make *Braveheart* one of the best-selling films of the decade. *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Top Gun*, the *Die Hard* films, *Gladiator* – the movies a man loves reveal what his heart yearns for, what is set inside him from the day of his birth. I anticipate that many readers, good men and women, will dismiss this as some sort of macho-man pep rally. Not at all. I am simply searching, as many men are, for an authentic masculinity. Adventure is written into the heart of a man. And it’s not just about having fun. Adventure requires something of us, puts us to the test. Remember Nehemiah’s words to the few brave souls defending Jerusalem? ‘Don’t be afraid . . . fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.’

The battle itself is never enough; a man yearns for romance. It's not enough to be a hero; he must be a hero to someone in particular, to the woman he loves. Every great movie has (1) a hero (2) a villain (3) a woman to be rescued. This is simply a summary of the revelation of reality presented in the Bible. These movies appeal to us because they ring true to reality and to our nature."

Born to Battle

Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign (have dominion) over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals along the ground." (Gen. 1:26-28) "Adam and his sons after him are

given an incredible mission: Here is the entire earth, Adam. Explore it, cultivate it, care for it - it is your kingdom. This is a charter to find the equator, a commission to build Camelot. Only Eden is a garden at that point, everything else is wild, so far as we know. No river has been charted, no ocean crossed, no mountain climbed. No one has discovered the molecule, or fuel injection, or Beethoven's Fifth. It is a blank page, waiting to be written. Most men think they are here on earth to kill time - and it's killing them. But truth is precisely the opposite. The secret longing of your heart, whether it is to build a boat and sail it, to write a symphony and play it, to plant a field and care for it - those are the things you were made to do. That is what you are here for. Explore, build, conquer - you don't have to tell a boy to do those things for the simple reason that it is his purpose. But it is going to take risk and danger."

Genesis 1:1 describes a part of God's ongoing process of creation, but as we find out in Genesis 3, something momentous had already taken place. There had been a rebellion in heaven, and an angel with great beauty and power had been cast down to earth. This part of the story is related in poetic, symbolic language in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and Revelation 12. An enemy, the serpent, the dragon, was already residing on the earth. I believe that the charge to Adam to reign or have dominion over the earth certainly included taking dominion over the enemy of God and man. Adam lost that battle when he and Eve listened to the lying, seductive words of the serpent.

Because of the fall, the sin, of Adam and Eve, Genesis 3 records God's curse on the serpent, on the woman, and on the man. To the woman: *I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth* (I may be mistaken about this, but I believe that the pain of childbirth is of a different magnitude for human mothers than for any other mammal. At least, when I have seen animal births on National Geographic they appear to be painless.) *And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you. And to the man he said, Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree . . . the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you . . . By the sweat of your brow you will have food to eat. . . For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.* (Genesis 3) In The Sacred Romance, John and Brent say that God's curse on Eve has come to mean that women will try to find their meaning and fulfillment in life through their relationships, especially with their husbands, but they will always be frustrated in this goal. Likewise, men will try to find their identity and purpose in their work, but in the end their striving will leave them empty. God's love and justice are really at work in these curses, because man was created to find his identity and fulfillment in his relationship with God, and his striving to find ultimate fulfillment anywhere else means that he is looking to idols rather than to his heavenly Father, and God will not permit it.

Virtually all of the old paintings and icons of Jesus make him look like a girl. And the church's appeal has been effeminate - - that is why at least 60% of the church is made up of women. Jesus' appeal was to men, and to women, to lay down their very lives in service to him. Can we understand why Islam would appeal to men? They demand that men publicly kneel down on the ground five times a day and pray to their god. They challenge men to go on jihad and die for Allah. If they do that they promise them a paradise with 72 virgins! It is a false religion with a false god and false promises, but all of it is appealing to men who want a great cause to live and die for. We have been misrepresenting God to men and women. The real God presents a far higher challenge, with greater costs, greater adventure, and greater rewards than any false religion can come up with.

Consider for a moment the Creator, the God of the Bible: Tremper Longman says, "Virtually every book of the Bible - Old and New Testaments - and almost every page tells us about God's warring activity." Think about Yahweh's war with the Egyptians: plagues, pestilence, death of every firstborn. Think about Joshua's wars with the Canaanites. Think about Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees. God's stories are stories of adventure and courage, of men of valor confronting a malignant evil. Daniel in the Lion's den; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego thrown into a fiery furnace; and in a later day David Livingstone going to the dark, unknown continent of Africa. Men lose themselves in a fanatical addiction to a sports team; or to their careers; or to an affair; or to some crazy substance abuse or gambling addiction, many times because they are bored out of their minds and have no higher challenge in life.

Who is God anyway? How do you picture God in heaven? An old, old man with a white beard and a stern face sitting up in front of a court room? The gifts of the Spirit are gifts from God and describe God's essence: love, joy, and peace are the first gifts listed. God is full of love and joy, He is wild and free, He loves the men and women He created with a zeal that is emotional, passionate, and burning. God loves adventure. Think of the stories he authored in his Book: Abraham offering up his precious son on an altar; Moses confronting the most powerful ruler on earth and demanding that he release God's people; Joseph sold into slavery and rising from the dungeon to the throne; the Son of God riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, knowing he was going to a cross to break Satan's hold on mankind. John Eldredge says that "if you have any doubts as to whether or not God loves wildness, spend a night in the woods alone. Take a walk out in a thunderstorm. Go for a swim with a pod of killer whales. Get a bull moose mad at you. Whose idea was this, anyway? The Great Barrier Reef with its great white sharks, the jungles of India with their tigers. Most of the earth is not safe; but it's good." The God who created all of this is not boring, and He has not called us to a boring life.

I have been thinking about David, who was called "A man after God's heart." The three most significant men in the Old Testament were Abraham, Moses, and David.

David's name is listed in the concordance over 1,100 times. He was one of the ancestors of Jesus. One of the titles of Jesus, the Messiah, was "Son of David." Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of David. Jerusalem was called "The City of David." David wrote many of the Psalms. David was a warrior! As a young shepherd, he killed a lion and a bear, with his bare hands and a club! (This had to have been with special anointing and enabling by God.) He boldly confronted a gigantic, evil, enemy soldier, confronted him in full view of his army and the enemy army, killed him with a slingshot and cut off his head with his own sword. He was a man after God's heart! David was a type of Christ! He was not as courageous as Jesus Christ, nor as wise, nor as good.

Let's rethink our image of God, and of Christ, and of the Christian life! Please!

QUOTES

1. 125 times in the Psalms, David said, "I will." I will arise, I will praise God, I will humble myself, etc. We give never-ending commands to little children: Don't touch that, Don't run in the street, Don't put that in your mouth. As the child matures, we trust their wisdom more and more. Many godly people are afraid of the responsibility of making decisions, but God is not going to tell us every decision to make: Don't drink that, Don't watch that, Go and do that. Yes, we must listen to the Spirit, but God didn't give us free will so that we could be puppets or remain children.
2. One of the names or titles of Jesus is, "Desire of the Nations." He is what the nations need and desire, they just don't know it.
3. The Kingdom of God is within you. What is real inside us is released and transforms the world around us. Thus, Jesus calmed the storm because of the peace in His heart. Peter's shadow healed people.
4. Jesus Christ is the exact image of the Father. Any doctrine or theology you believe about God that doesn't line up with the character and teaching of Jesus must be questioned.
5. Jesus returned from the wilderness in the "fullness of the Spirit." We receive a "measure of the Spirit." That probably explains why we can't do all the things that Jesus did. But He said, *The things I do you will do, and greater things....* I think we need to pray for more of His Spirit. Amen?

THE TRINITY AS REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This is the name of a book published a few years ago by my friend Ford Wilson. Ford and Beth are life-time missionaries in Mexico, and in his spare time (that's a joke!) Ford has spent 55 years studying the Bible in the original languages and studying the works of scholars, ancient and modern. This 400-page book is the fruit of a lifetime of prayer and faithful study. I am not a scholar, but I found this book fascinating. A few quotes, in paraphrase:

- When Christ healed the man born blind, the Pharisees could not see that He was the Creator, again using the dust of the earth mixed with divine saliva and His word, to re-create the eyes of a man born blind.
- In Romans, Paul revealed to us the profound mysteries of the Godhead like no one else. He mentions God there once in every thirteen words. Only those who determine to obey God will know God's truth.

- Scripture does not merely contain a few anthropomorphisms; on the contrary, all Scripture is anthropomorphic, expressed in human terms, from beginning to end. Therefore, whatever pertains to creatures is applied to God, especially human organs, members, sensations, affections, etc. Although God is a Spirit and does not have a body, mention is made of God's eye, eyelids, ears, nose, mouth, lips, tongue, finger, arms, right hand, foot. Every human emotion is also present in God: joy, grief, anger, fear, love, compassion mercy, zeal, jealousy, hatred, wrath. Human actions are ascribed to God: knowing, trying, thinking, speaking, calling, seeing, feeling, tasting, smelling, healing, wiping away tears, etc. (How else could God communicate about himself to us except by using words meaningful to us?)
- Section 12 is a study in the Old Testament which portray the existence of two persons called God, Yahweh, Creator, Adonai (Lord), and about the "Angel of the Lord" who is also called God, Yahweh, Creator, and Adonai, who has the nature and attributes of God, while being distinguished from another called God, Yahweh, Creator and Yahweh.
- Section 3 is research into the Old Testament that reveals to us three distinct individuals or persons with the names, attributes, or actions corresponding to God mentioned in the same passage.
- The word translated "God," ELOHIM in the Hebrew, is uniplural. This word is used 2,570 times in the Old Testament.
- This book is a gold mine to refute the heresies of: Unitarianism/Dualism/Polytheism/Pantheism/Atheism/Mormonism/Jehovah's Witnesses/Evolution/Humanism/Deism/Jesus only.

I could go on and on, but you get the idea. To purchase this book, send \$22.00, plus \$3.00 shipping, to: Alliance for Church Progress, PO Box 1013, Kaufman, Texas, 75142.

JOY AND GRATITUDE

(from John Ortberg, The Life you've Always Wanted)

"The first close friendship I ever had began when I was 15 years old. Chuck and I went through high school and college together and were chums together through every important event of life. Several years ago Chuck, who by that time was a doctor and had a family, called to tell me he had cancer. The initial prognosis was good, and in typical fashion Chuck shaved his head, covered it with glue, sprinkled it with gold glitter, and walked around his house telling his kids he was 'Chemo-Man.'

Chuck and I lived 2,000 miles apart, but we talked every Saturday morning during the time of his treatment. The chemotherapy destroyed his appetite; he was unable to keep food down; he became so emaciated he was almost unrecognizable to his children. At one point an infection set in, and his condition was briefly touch-and-go. But Chuck pulled through. Chemo-Man had prevailed.

A month later, Chuck had his first checkup. He called me

that night: The cancer was back, the doctor told him, at levels as high as they had been before treatment. Being a doctor himself, he knew this meant he was going to die. It was a death sentence.

I was numb. When I went to bed that night, I couldn't even pray. At 6:30 the next morning, Chuck called again. 'You won't believe this,' he said. Someone in the lab had mistakenly switched his results with those of another patient, who had not even been through treatment. It turned out that Chuck's cancer was gone - and has not reappeared, these many years later. 'I'm going to live,' my friend said. 'I'm going to see my kids grow up. I'm going to grow old with my wife. I'm going to live.'

For a few moments we just wept on the phone like a couple of characters out of a Hallmark commercial. Chuck told me he was filled with a gratitude he had never known. He couldn't stop touching his kids or hugging his wife. Things that had bothered him before faded into utter insignificance. He was going to live - and suddenly he not just knew intellectually but actually experienced the truth. That life is a gift. We don't earn it, can't control it, can't take a moment of it for granted. Every tick of the clock is a gift from God."

P. S.

I want to report that the surgery on my left ear was successful and got all the cancer cells. PTL! Thanks so much for your prayers.

God Bless

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I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry.

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