

The Story – Creation

Here we are at the first Sunday of a brand new year and the start of a year long focus on the big stories of the Bible. We are looking at the story of redemption as it threads its way through the bible. I believe it is going to be an interesting journey and I look forward to studying and growing together.

Let me encourage you to follow along with the reading guide we've provided. If you already use a reading guide of some kind to help you read the bible through the year, great. But if not, feel free to take a guide and join us. There is something exciting about learning what the Bible says for yourself. You start to take ownership of the spiritual truths of the bible. "I know this because I read the bible and it says..." This isn't something you heard, this is something you read and you know. The more you know what the Bible says, the better you will know the God of the bible. I'm believing this year we will grow in a deepening relationship with God as we study the bible together. Howard Hendricks in his book *Living By The Book* wrote, "**The Bible was written not to be studied but to change our lives. Life-change is the product we are after.**" ...**Howard Hendricks** By the end of this series I don't want you to just have information about the bible, instead my prayer is that your life will have been changed by The Story, His story of redemption.

Turn to Genesis 1 and as Julie Andrews sang in *The Sound of Music*, "Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start..." For us, we begin with the first book in the bible, with the first sentence and perhaps the most important, most beautiful and most controversial ten words ever written in the English language, "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**" All you have to do is read those words, step back and let the fight begin. "What do you mean God created the heavens and the earth? Don't you know about the Big Bang theory? Don't you know about evolution? How old do you think the earth is anyway? Don't you know about the expanding universe? Surely you don't believe some being created the universe in six days!"

It seems as if it raises more questions than answers. What is the point of the creation story? First understand, **The creation story presented in the bible is not a scientific treatise.** If God had wanted to give us the details explaining how he created the world he could have, but would it have made any difference then or now in our faith? "Here is the scientific composition of the sun and the moon and the stars and this is the method I used in creating them." Would you

know more if God said, “On the first day when I said let there be light, by the way that means there is actually creative power in the words I speak but there is no way your brain can understand that, anyway I decided to make the sun first which is about 71% hydrogen and 27 % helium and then for the rest I mixed together about 67 other elements and...” For most of us, no, details won’t help.

James Weldon Johnson was an African American who wrote a book celebrating the unique art of preaching in the African American church in the early 1900s. He turned the sermons into verse. In his sermon *The Creation*, he told it like this, “And God stepped out on space, and he looked around and said: I’m lonely – I’ll make me a world. And far as the eye of God could see darkness covered everything, blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp. Then God smiled, and the light broke, and the darkness rolled up on one side, and the light stood shining on the other, and God said: That’s good!” The fact is, God created. How he did it, when he did it, the methodology used in doing it, exactly how long it took him to create it, that’s unnecessary to my understanding or to my belief that God created the heavens and the earth.

The point, the purpose of the story of creation as presented in Genesis is not to give us scientific detail that explains the origin of all things. **The creation account is not a scientific treatise, it is a revelation of spiritual truth.** I am not saying the creation story is inaccurate, I’m saying the process involved is not as important as the spiritual truth and reality revealed to us in Creation. Is the earth 10,000 years old or 10 billion years old? The Genesis account doesn’t tell us. Could God have created the world and mankind only a few thousand years ago but created everything to appear much older? Sure. God the Creator could do this anyway he chose.

I assume on the first day of Adam’s existence he looked like a young man, maybe in his twenties or thirties. “How old are you Adam?” Holding up one finger he says, “This many.” I doubt that happened. The point is, the writer of Genesis, traditionally thought to be Moses, was moved by the Holy Spirit to record the story, not to give scientific details and specifics about the earth, nor to answer all of our questions, but to give details about the main subject. What’s the main subject you ask? Remember having to diagram sentences in seventh grade English class? Your English teacher would be proud to know you are using your ability to diagram a sentence this morning. What is the subject in this sentence: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”** God is the subject, created is the verb. God is the main subject and that’s what

the creation story is all about. So what are some of the spiritual truths revealed to us in Genesis 1:1 about the main subject?

God has no beginning. God is eternal. He was there before the beginning. In fact, we can ask what does this mean when the bible says “in the beginning.” The beginning of what? The beginning of recorded time? The beginning of the human race, the material universe? The answer is, it doesn’t matter because God was there before everything. He existed before all things and all things exist through him and because of him!

What does that mean for us? It means that the eternal God, who existed before all things, before time began, is the God who loves us and He can handle anything and everything we might face. There is no god like our God and there is nothing He cannot do because he is the eternal God. He has no beginning and he will have no end.

In Deuteronomy 4 Moses said to the people, “**Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God... as you have and lived?...You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides him there is no other.**” Deuteronomy 4:32-35 Listen, I don’t have to worry about 2016 because the Eternal God is my God. I have nothing to fear!

God alone is the Creator. In the beginning God created... The verse tells us that before there was anything, there was God and at a particular time in the beginning, God began to create. He didn’t make the heavens and the earth out of something already existing, rather he created all that exists out of nothing because he was there before there was anything. The theologians use the Latin phrase *creatio ex nihilo* = “**creation out of nothing.**” This testifies to us of God’s uniqueness, his power, his might, his sovereignty. He exists unique and apart from everything else. He is Creator and everything else is his creation.

The significance that God created all things, including us, cannot be over-emphasized. The fact that God created us means he has a right to us, a claim to us. It means he knows us and what we need. He knows how we function. He knows what is best for us and what will destroy us. He has warned us and instructed us in his book and if we will live according to His word, he will bless us. You can trust him that he is telling you the truth and that

he knows best because he created you, he fashioned you, he knows you, the bible says. Trust him and live according to the design and purpose of your creator.

He is our Creator. **Our life has significance, meaning and purpose because God created us.** If we are just an accident of the universe, some random collection of cells that accidentally managed to pull ourselves out of the slime, grew legs and stood up, we don't have meaning, purpose, or significance beyond the slugs and snails in the garden. We just lucked out in the height department and grew those opposable thumbs but that's about it. But if God created us... everything is different. It is the first affirmation of the Apostle's Creed that we studied last year and the basis and foundation upon which all else is built, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." It must be because he created us in his own image, that he loved us. And when we sinned and fell from his grace, because we were his creation and because he loved us, he provided a means by which we could be redeemed and forgiven and restored to fellowship and right relationship with him. He created us, and by our sinfulness and rebellion he lost us but thank God he made a way for us to be redeemed and restored to himself! Because he created us, our life matters! Here is something else the creation story reveals:

God brought order as he created. Notice what the bible says, **"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.'"**

God created the earth but left it without form, without purpose, structure or function and then God began to assign roles and function and order to the earth. It is worth noting that the Spirit of God brings order out of chaos. He did it in the universe and he does it in the lives of individuals still. Part of that order he brings involves differentiation and distinction. The passage we quoted from says he distinguished light from darkness. As we read on in chapter 1 we see this distinction or differentiation repeated. (v6) "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." (12) "The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds." We can go on, God distinguishing seasons, days and years, creating living creatures that would reproduce after their own kind. Finally he created man and woman in his own image and distinguished them from all other living creatures, giving them dominion over the living creatures.

Our old friend Peter Kreeft commented, “God creates everything by differentiating. Form, species, differentiation – this feature of the world is due to accident according to materialism and illusion according to pantheism, but it is due to divine will and design according to theism. God distinguishes being vs. nonbeing, light vs. darkness, the ‘waters above’ (the heavens) vs. the ‘waters below’ (the earth), seas vs. land, living vs. nonliving, plants vs. animals, birds vs. fish vs. land animals, species vs. species, each ‘after its kind’, animals vs. humanity (in God’s image) – and Adam vs. Eve, man vs. woman. Masculinity and femininity are not a sinister trick of nature or society but a wise and benevolent gift of God, and cause for rejoicing, not for embarrassment, except to the fallenness that leads us to hide from God and from each other.”

God created order out of chaos, making these distinctions out of “divine will and design”. There is spiritual truth in this. I think it is worthy of note that in our culture as we have denied the existence of God as creator, we have also chosen to blur and even ignore the lines of distinction he established. We have blurred the lines between spiritual light and darkness so Christians talk and behave like non-Christians. We have blurred the lines between species, the lines between animals and human beings so we have groups like PETA that want us to treat animals as though they were human beings with legal rights and standing. (I am opposed to people mistreating animals, don’t get me wrong, but animals and human beings are not the same, they were created differently, with distinction. Only man and woman were created in the image of God with God breathing into them and they became living souls. We will talk about this next week.) Treat animals with respect, love and appreciate them, value them, but your dog or cat is not a human being.

We have blurred the lines with regard to masculine and feminine sexuality. We have a whole list of new terms to describe people, bisexual, trans-sexual, transgendered, gender fluid (identifying as both genders, you aren’t sure if you are male or female), pan sexual (you are sexually attracted to male, female, transgendered, transsexual, or any and all sexual orientations). The point is, God created us with order and distinction and by turning away from him, making ourselves “little gods” and seeing ourselves as “creators” entitled to create our own identity and sexuality, we have moved away from God’s order and his blessing. We dethrone God and place ourselves on the throne as creator. We are saying “I know more than God about myself” and that was at the heart of Adam and Eve’s fall and Satan’s temptation. Trust me, the outcome will

always result in a fall! It won't go any better for you than it did for Adam and Eve. When we stop living according to God's created order we will find ourselves living once again in chaos and confusion, empty and in darkness.

I know I don't have to try to convince you that God created the heavens and the earth. The truth is we can't prove it to anyone's satisfaction. There are wonderful resources written by brilliant scientists and scholars who believe God created the heavens and the earth so don't let anyone tell you it's ignorant or naïve to believe in creation. But the best way you can know the truth and validity of the Genesis account of creation is to have the same thing happen to you. What do I mean? Look at the verse again. "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

For everyone of us there is emptiness and darkness apart from a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. St. Augustine wrote, "**You have made us for yourself O Lord and our heart is restless until it rests in you.**" St. Augustine. Life is chaotic without God and his order. Empty, darkness, confusion, without purpose or meaning. Does this sound familiar? Does this describe you and your circumstances? **There is good news! God the Creator is still creating!** He is ready to create in you a new heart. The Spirit of God is still hovering over your life, brooding over you, waiting for you to turn to the Lord. He is ready to bring light into your darkness, to rescue and redeem. Even in creation we see the unfolding drama of redemption.

The apostle Paul wrote, "**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17**" God wants to create a new life in you, a new life for you. He has good things waiting for all who will come to him in repentance and faith. There is rest for the restlessness you've experienced all these years. There is a new beginning for you in this new year. He wants to breathe new life into you just as he did into Adam and Eve so you can truly become a living soul. The choice is yours. Why not let him create a new you?

Maybe you are already a new creation in Christ, but you've been making choices like you know more than God knows about you and your life. As I said before, you are trying to be your own creator, go your own way, blurring the lines of distinction that God ordained. It's time to surrender to his will, his way, before you fall like Adam and Eve. He knows you best because he created you. He knows you and he loves you. Trust him and surrender to his way, his will, his plan, his purpose. It's the perfect way to start a new year, surrendered to Jesus!

