



THE JOURNEY CHURCH

SERMON GUIDE 1.2.2022

GENESIS

How to Approach the Bible's First Pages

SCRIPTURE:

Genesis 1-2

RECAP:

I'm excited today as we begin a brand new series in Genesis. Throughout the year we are going to rotate through Genesis, Colossians, and the Gospel of John (summer in the Psalms will continue). We may throw in a topical series at some point, but we want to keep giving you a steady diet of preaching from books of the Bible so that you receive the whole counsel of God. And the book of Genesis is so rich with important biblical doctrines and truth that serve as a foundation for understanding the entirety of the Christian faith. Over the next several weeks we are going to address the nature of God, creation specifics, the Imago Dei, the distinction of man from creation, the vocation of man, Sabbath, marriage, and more.

Have you heard of the Mandela Effect? It's a phenomenon where you have a false memory. For example: Darth Vader never says, "Luke, I am your father." He said, "I am your father." In Snow White the Wicked Witch never said, "Mirror Mirror on the wall." What did she say? "Magic Mirror on the wall."

Did you know there are things you likely believe that you think are in the Bible or are Christian, but are actually not found there? There are ideas that we assimilate into our thinking because we've heard people say them that we just assume are in the Bible. But there are many unbiblical ideas that have worked their way into popular Christian thought over the years.

- "God will never put more on you than you can handle."
- "They got their wings" or "Heaven got another angel"
- The Rapture
- "This too shall pass"
- Sinner's Prayer

Rather than exploring whether or not we may unwittingly hold a wrong view, we tend to dig our heels in further and argue because we don't like to think our views are wrong. Well, now that I've offended a good chunk of the room, I want to transition to the subject of Creation, where it is easy for us to also hold views not necessitated by Scripture, but more so popular thought or tradition, and yet we tend to dig our heels in on them as if they are a test of true belief. So let's see if I can offend you further :-)

The beginning of the Bible (Genesis) and the end of the Bible (Revelation) are very disputed portions of the Bible by Christians. They are disputed because they are interpreted in different ways. Christians disagree about what the 1,000 year reign of Christ looks like (as described in Revelation). It's not that believers dispute that Christ will reign, or are arguing over whether they believe the text, the disagreement is over what it means. The same is true over the beginning of the Bible, and in particular the questions surrounding creation. Christians who believe the Bible, and love the Bible, can disagree over what we think the meaning of Genesis 1 and 2 is. We can disagree over the mechanics, timing, and how to read what is recorded.

I want to remind you of something we talked about over a year and half ago, about different tiers of doctrine. Not every doctrine of the church has equal weight or importance. Not every belief is a matter of faithfulness or orthodoxy. Tier 1 beliefs are a matter of salvation, and being a Christian: the Trinity, Jesus as fully God and fully man, Jesus as the Savior for sinners, the Resurrection, etc. Tier 2 beliefs are those that we can disagree on and still be believers, but we may not be able to fellowship in the same church: baptism, church governance, Lord's Supper, philosophy of worship, philosophy of missions, etc. Tier 3 beliefs are those that we can differ on while maintaining fellowship with one another (so long as we don't over-emphasize these things and elevate them to higher importance than we should): understanding of spiritual gifts, philosophy of children's ministry or discipleship, understanding of sovereignty of God and human responsibility, views of the end times, and what we're talking about today: the subject of creation. Another way of distinguishing is closed-handed issues and open-handed issues. Closed-handed issues are things we must agree on. Open-handed issues are things we can graciously spar over.

There is no way to say everything that could be said, or to address every question that is raised, but we are going to lean into the important issues that are vital for us as Christians to grasp and understand. Today's message aims to: **encourage us to deal seriously with the Bible as we seek to interpret its meaning while demonstrating charity and grace with those who disagree with us on secondary issues.** We'll do this by:

- Addressing the different views people have of Genesis 1-2
- Exploring issues raised by the text
- Identifying those beliefs Christians must hold.

Rather than mining down on one verse or a handful of verses, I'm going to hover like a helicopter over the first two chapters, dropping down to land on a few spots. Next week's sermon will mine down into Genesis 1:1. But today we approach the first two chapters from a macro-view.

Scripture Exegesis: Genesis 1-2

One of the first questions you must ask as you open the cover of the Bible and begin in Genesis is who is writing this, and why are they writing it? What is their goal? The author is Moses, and he is writing to give the people of Israel a history and understanding of who they are as the people of God, and to teach them about the God who has made covenant with them. The God who has made a covenant with them is YHWH. He is the true God. He is the Author and Creator of the world. He isn't a local deity as the Ancient Near East was full of. No, He is the Living God. He is the Great I Am.

So Moses begins his 5 book accounting with God, the world He made, the sin that has devastated the world, the fall out from that sin, the establishment of a covenant with Abraham, the story of Abraham's descendants (including Joseph who goes into Egypt). Exodus picks up the rescue of God's covenant people, the giving of the Law (Ten Commandments), and the wilderness years in the desert. Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy lay out more of the law and history of the people prior to Moses' death and the ascension of Joshua as the leader that takes them into the promised land.

There are a handful of prominent interpretations of how to understand what is happening in the creation account of Genesis 1-2:3, and I want to highlight a few of them and some unique features with them. I'm not going to give an exhaustive list, but this will cover the spectrum. We are not talking about progressive Christianity vs conservative Christianity. This isn't about pro-science vs anti-science. Holding to Young Earth isn't a litmus test for

biblical fidelity. At the same time, holding onto something other than old earth isn't anti-science. We need to be slow to those conclusions.

Young Earth Creationism

This view is that when you read Genesis 1-2:3, what it is saying is exactly what it means. A lot of people call this a literal reading of the text, but I want to correct that. We should all read the Bible (all of it) as literal, but literal means within the framework of the genre it is presenting. [So when Jesus tells a parable, I believe he is literally telling a story, and that the story has real truths it is conveying, but I don't read it as if the thing he is saying really happened. Why? Because it is a parable. The text itself cues me as to how I am to understand it.] Each day of creation is 24 hours long, just as a day is for us. According to this view, the universe, including the earth, would be about 6,000 years to 20,000 year old (at the max). Ken Ham (who does a lot of great work for creation) is a proponent of this view, as well Al Mohler, Puritan John Owen, and others. A variation of this view is the belief that God created everything in six 24 hour days, but created everything with the appearance of age. Just as Adam and Eve are created as adults (Adam meets Eve as someone that's been created minutes earlier but is fully developed).

Its strengths/fundamentals: **1.** It takes God at His word in letting Him be the authority over our knowledge of creation. **2.** It gives God the credit and glory for what He has done in creation as opposed to the secular view of time+chance+matter. **3.** It elevates science to the exploration of God's workmanship.

Its weaknesses: **1.** Some believe it conflicts with modern science, **2.** There is a lot happening in each one of the days and seems too full (on the sixth day God created Adam, planted a Garden for him, talked to Adam, brought him the animals to name, Adam named them, God created Eve, and brought her to the man) , **3.** presents issues with chronology of creation (i.e. there are plants created before there is a sun for them to live on.)

Old Earth Creationism

This view is that the Earth and Universe are old, perhaps millions or billions of years old as some dating methods suggest. But many old earth creationists do not hold this view based on scientific data, but based on the word "day" in the Hebrew (yom). It doesn't always mean a 24 hour day, but often implies a period of time ("in the day of Moses" implies an era). In this view, the creation event of each era could have taken many years for each one. So each day is considered an era of time. One of the interesting arguments raised by the Old Earth Creationists is that each of the six days finish with "and it was

evening and morning" the X day. But the seventh day doesn't do that. The seventh day is considered the day of God's rest from creation, and in that sense, we are still in the seventh day right now. And the seventh day will one day give way to the eighth day when Christ returns and He makes all things new in the world (He recreates). Wayne Grudem, D.A. Carson, J.I. Packer are theologians today who hold this view. This view is not an evolutionary view. It does not believe species evolved into new species.

Its strengths/fundamentals: **1.** It takes God at His word and seeks for Him to be the authority over our knowledge of creation. **2.** It gives God the credit and glory for what He has done in creation as opposed to the secular view of time+chance+matter. **3.** It elevates science to the exploration of God's workmanship.

Its weaknesses: **1.** The days are numbered in Genesis and have "evening and morning" designations, **2.** Doesn't offer great solutions for chronological problems.

Literary Framework View

This view says that the structure of days laid out in Genesis 1 is a literary framework and isn't truly conveying a chronology. This view points to different elements within the text as pointing to a literary structure. An example would be that in the first 3 days we see God create the major structural spaces, and the last three days He fills them accordingly. So Day 1 is the light, Day 4 is the Sun and Moon. Day 2 is the Sky and Waters below and Day 5 is birds and fish. Day 3 is the land (and plants) and Day 6 is animals and man. They would say it is poetry and more of a literary device to communicate true things. This is pastor/theologian Tim Keller's view.

Its strengths/fundamentals: **1.** It doesn't get entangled in chronology issues, **2.** It takes God at His word in letting Him be the authority over our knowledge of creation. **3.** It gives God the credit and glory for what He has done in creation as opposed to the secular view of time+chance+matter. **4.** It elevates science to the exploration of God's workmanship.

Its weaknesses: **1.** The text itself presents time as passing, with a progression taking place (this view doesn't change that or properly deal with it), **2.** Seems to allegorize things that appear to be descriptive.

Historical Creationism

This view says that God created everything in the universe in Genesis 1:1 (and that time is not in an instant, but an unspecified amount of time, possibly thousands of years or

millions of years). Then Genesis 1:2 and on describe God bringing shape to that creation. This isn't the Gap theory, which says there's a gap between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2 where there is cosmic rebellion and everything is being recreated. This view holds that the aim of Genesis 1, particularly the six days, is to form the land specifically for man, because it was formless and void (Genesis 1:2). It is a preparation of the Promised Land. This is the view I loosely hold. John Piper holds this view as well, which pretty much settles the question. The reason I say "loosely" is because a better argument, more faithful to the text, could persuade me.

Its strengths/fundamentals: **1.** Leaves room for both an old earth or young earth and a literal six 24 hour day forming period. **2.** It takes God at His word in letting Him be the authority over our knowledge of creation. **3.** It gives God the credit and glory for what He has done in creation as opposed to the secular view of time+chance+matter. **4.** It elevates science to the exploration of God's workmanship.

Its weaknesses: **1.** it's not as widely held as other views, **2.** requires some Hebrew word explanation that the English doesn't always capture.

Notice the common thread and fundamentals of each of these positions are the same. They hold the same commitments which is why they seek understanding, even if they land on different conclusions.

Some people don't hold sophisticated views at all and boil it down to a few points (Sproul leaned young earth but didn't land definitively):

- Augustine held to instantaneous creation (that everything was created at once, in an instant)
- Some say, "I believe what the Bible says about creation, but I think the days are different than what we experience today" or they'll say "God supplied light for plants before the sun was created" which is not an obstacle to God.
- Some believe that the 6 days were 24 hour days, but that there could be long periods of time between each day
- Others hold that each day is a day in which God revealed the acts of creation to Moses, not a 24 hour day in which God made the world.

I share all these with you to inform you about these positions. It is the mark of taking the Bible seriously that we wrestle with these things. However, we must make sure that we distinguish between the things that are close-handed and the things that are open-handed. That's why these prominent theologians both now and historically could

disagree on these issues without believing one another to be heretics. I want to do that now.

Closed-handed Issues:

- **God's Word is the authoritative source on Creation**
- **God is eternal and existed before Creation** (Creator/Creature distinction)
- **God created the the Heavens and the Earth from nothing** (everything, ex nihilo)
- **God speaks** (He reveals, He communicates, and His Word comes with power)
- **Mankind is created distinct from other living creatures** (Imago Dei)
- **Humans have a teleology** (we existed for a purpose, with a mission, stewardship and dominion of the earth, be fruitful and multiply, communion with God)
- **Human beings are accountable to God** (God is our Creator, we're not our own)
- **God created the world good** (without sin)
- **Adam and Eve are humanity's first parents**
- **Adam and Eve are historical people**
- **Creation has a teleology** (God created the world for His glory)
- **Order and Structure of Creation is revealed** (differences of men and women, roles)
- **The Complexity of God** (hint of Trinity, divine attributes)

Open-handed Issues:

- **The Role of Science** (Science is the study of creation, and what creation reveals and tells of the glory of God. So we shouldn't be scared of science. We shouldn't adopt everything a scientist says because science is not always neutral. But we shouldn't dismiss everything science says because God reveals Himself through His creation -- Romans 1, Psalm 19. Science continuously evolves with new and better information. God's Word never changes.)
- **Age of the Earth** (millions of years vs thousands of years)
- **The Length of 6 Days** (24 hour days or ages of time)
- **Animal Death** (did animals die prior to the fall of man or after)
- **Predation** (were there predators and prey prior to the fall)
- **How long were Adam and Eve in the Garden before sinning?**
- **Did Adam and Eve have children prior to the fall?**

I hope you'll see from what I've just laid out, that the open-handed issues are not unimportant, but they pale in comparison to the close-handed issues. In fact, you can affirm the close-handed issues while holding different views on those open-handed

issues. Mature believers are able to discern the difference. It's okay to hold a view about the age of the earth, or the meaning of the days of creation listed in Genesis 1, but it is vital that we hold the main things together, and then we are gracious toward one another in where we land on these other issues. There are difficult issues raised that Jesus loving, Bible-believing people land on different interpretations. So we should be humble in our Genesis 1-2 interpretations, being dogmatic about those things we should be dogmatic about, and be charitable on issues where there is room for dispute.

I'm going to wrap up today by driving a few points home to the heart.

The world we live in testifies to the reality of God. He is the Author Maker over all things. And we are made by Him. We have our life and being solely in God (Acts 17). The beauty and complexities of the world tell us something about God's power, wisdom, goodness, and eternal nature. We are accountable to Him, and owe Him our obedience, devotion, and lives. Our lives exist, along with all of creation, to bring God glory. We do that by living with gratitude and thankfulness to God. But we have fallen short of the glory of God. We have each sinned and rebelled through our own desires. This sin leaves us estranged from God. We need reconciliation.

And no matter how wonderful, complex, fascinating, and seismic the creation is, it doesn't tell us how to solve that problem. It doesn't tell us how to be reconciled to the One who is the Creator. But thankfully God Himself chooses to speak. He reveals.

And what He has revealed, and what we gather to celebrate this morning as a church body, is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is that Savior who reconciles us to God. God not only created the world, and us, but He also provided for us a Redeemer to atone for our sins. Jesus is the One we must trust and believe in to be restored to our Creator. We are still accountable to God, and our only hope for justification and peace is the finished work of Jesus -- his death and resurrection applied to our lives.

God's Word goes out and creates the universe. But God's Word also goes out to save the universe. Jesus is that Word.

And for the one reconciled, the exploration of the glory of God in His creation is not just a hobby, it is something our hearts delight to do.

Psalm 111:2 -- Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are some other things you've heard that don't have a basis in Scripture?
2. Why is it important to understand the genre of Scripture?
3. Do you validate everything you hear against Scripture?
4. What is the difference between Tier 1, 2, and 3 doctrines? Why is it important that we don't elevate Tier 3 doctrines to a level higher than they should be?
5. Which view of creation do you ascribe to the most?
6. What is the difference between open-handed vs close-handed issues?
7. What was the Word that God used to create us, redeem us, and one day renew us?