



THE JOURNEY CHURCH

SERMON GUIDE 1.9.2022

GENESIS

In the Beginning

SCRIPTURE:

Genesis 1:1

RECAP:

We are in the book of Genesis again today. We started last week and will remain in Genesis 1 & 2 for these first two months of the year. So much of theology goes back to the opening chapters of the Bible. Last week, I spoke specifically about the kind of approach we need to take when reading the first pages of Scripture. Today we are going to dive more specifically into the first verse, Genesis 1:1.

I'm going to begin my message by reading the first line of several famous pieces of literature and you tell me the work is based on the first line.

- 'Call me Ishmael' (Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*)
- 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife' (Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*)
- "Mr. and Mrs. Dursley of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much." (J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter*)
- "Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy." (C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, & The Wardrobe*)
- It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. (Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*)

These are just a sampling of some of the most famous opening lines in literature. They are known because of how popular those works are. In addition to these titles, many stories open with the famous line, "Once upon a time." All of these opening lines send us into a story. But there are no opening lines in all of literature ever produced that compare with the Bible's opening line: **"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."** It is the most recognized opening line of any work of literature. It is likely the most known verse of the Bible. It's probably the most memorized verse in Scripture.

It is this first line in the first book of the Bible, that catapults us into a story. And this story is THE story. The first line of the story tells us a lot, and it is this first line that we are going to dive deeper into today.

This opening sentence of the Bible flies in the face of every other story that tries to account for the world and our existence in it. This opening line is either true or it is false. If it is false, and there is some other story, then the universe and everything in it is meaningless, including our inconsequential little lives. But if it is true, then not only is the universe charged with meaning and purpose, but so are our lives.

No one gets past the first verse of the Bible without being confronted about everything you believe.

****Scripture Exegesis: Genesis 1:1****

I. "In the beginning"

The question this phrase raises is: beginning of what? What is the context of this beginning? The beginning here is time itself. This beginning is the beginning of time, space, and matter. What this means is that there was a time when the universe did not exist. There was a time when nothing material existed.

What is really interesting about this, is that Enlightenment scientists once refuted the biblical teaching of the universe having a beginning and argued that it was eternal. They believed the universe has always been. Then an MIT Review shared that cosmologists were shifting, and that observational evidence is that our universe is expanding, therefore, it must also have been born in the past. In other words, the universe had a beginning. The scientists caught up with what the Bible has said forever.

II. "God"

The first 3 words of Genesis 1:1 is "Bereshith bara Elohim." The word "Elohim" is one of the Hebrew words for God. You have YHWH, which in your Bible is all caps LORD. You have the word Adonai, which is Lord in your Bible. Elohim means God, but interestingly is a plural word. Now Moses, who is writing this, is the same one who wrote in **Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one."** So Moses knows that God is one, yet we see the opening words of Scripture mention God in a plural form. Now, this first verse alone doesn't tell us everything, but it is an indicator and pointer to what we will see revealed more clearly as Scripture unfolds, that God is Triune. One God, Three Persons (God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit).

So in the opening words, we see that at the beginning of time, space, and matter, God is there. God is there before creation.

Psalm 90:2 -- Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

So what does this tell us about God? It reveals that God is a spirit and not a material being. Before the material, created, universe, there was God. And there are particular attributes of God that come into focus just from the first verse alone.

1. Aseity of God -- This word is not often used anymore in discussing God's attributes. But the aseity of God means His self-existence. It is His independence from anything outside Himself. He doesn't need anything. When we consider the aseity of God from a time perspective, we see He is eternal. He never came into being. He's always existed. He is a Being unlike any other being. The law of causality says that everything that begins to exist has a cause. If a hamburger begins to exist, it has to have a cause (someone made it). If a universe begins to exist, it has to have a cause. For something to come into being, it needs a cause. Watch this: but not God. Why? Because there was never a time when He began to exist. He is eternal. The aseity of God is demonstrated in Genesis 1:1 because we discover that God existed before He brought the universe into being.

R.C. Sproul used to say the word "aseity" sent chills up his spine, because **"in that one little word is captured all of the glory of the perfection of God's being. What makes God different from you, and different from me, and different from the stars, the earthquakes, and any creaturely thing is that God and God alone has aseity. God, and God alone, exists by His own power."**

2. God's Omnipotence -- We see the incredible power of God on display. It is one thing to think about something, but an entirely different thing to possess the capacity for doing it. I can't tell you the number of things I'm capable of imagining that I have zero ability to execute. God is never in this position. He has all the power to do what He pleases. Creation reveals this about its Maker.

3. God's Sovereignty -- We see from Genesis 1:1 that God, as Maker over the Creation, is the rightful ruler over that creation. Nothing can surpass Him as the determiner of what unfolds in His creation. Just as nobody can dictate to William Shakespeare, Ernest Hemingway, or Cormac McCarthy what must happen in their stories, their works of art, their creation of story within a novel, neither can anyone overrule God's sovereign rule and reign of all that unfolds.

4. God's Transcendence -- We see quickly that a being who can create this kind of world, this kind of universe, with all its intricacies, its size, and complexities, must be a Being quite unlike us. He transcends our comprehension and understanding. He is other than us. This is the psalmist's heart when he says:

Psalm 8:3-4 -- When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

The study and observance of creation, and the recognition that it is the work of God's hands, leads the psalmist to the perplexing disposition of wondering why this Being would ever be mindful of man or care for him. Why? Because creation reveals His total otherness, His transcendence. It is one thing to have the power to bring something into being, but it is a different thing to even imagine the thing itself. God thought of dogs, jellyfish, water, stars, digestive systems, brains. Each thing in itself is a thing imagined by God. It isn't a thing outside of God, but designed in its very essence by Him. This is simply an awe-inspiring thought.

5. God's Goodness -- God's goodness is the overflowing generosity of God's blessings pouring out to His creature. He does not receive anything from this. And He does not lack anything from doing this. The creation of all things demonstrates God's goodness, His self-giving of His own enjoyment and love to another. This is completely voluntary. He is under no compulsion to generously give anything. Rather, it is an attribute of who He is in His character.

6. God's Wisdom -- The wisdom of our God is demonstrated in creation. The creation of the heavens and earth tell us about the wisdom of its Maker. God's wisdom isn't just His

knowledge of all things, but His knowing of what is best and choosing that. Because of His wisdom, He never needs a redo. He never learns anything from a mistake (there are no mistakes).

I love Psalm 104. Let's read it. It's about creation.

Notice vs 24 -- **O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.** Creation reveals a God of wisdom.

When we read "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" we learn a lot about that God just from the creation He makes. As we observe this amazingly complex, sophisticated, and fine-tuned universe, we discover something about the God capable of such creation.

III. "created the heavens and the earth"

We learn in the Bible's first verse that everything we see, from galaxies in the universe to electric eels in the ocean depths, is created by God. God creates, ex nihilo (from nothing) all that exists.

Acts 17:24-25 -- The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

Notice that Paul tells the Athenians that the world and everything it is made by God. And because He made the world, He has no need from anything in the world. He doesn't live in material things. He is not served by material things. He is the author and sustainer of all things, not in need of anything.

Implications/Applications:

This passage stands in direct confrontation against alternative religious beliefs. When we read this first verse of the Bible, it confronts the errors of other worldviews and their attempt to explain the origins.

a. pantheism -- Everything material is god (this passage says the opposite, God is distinct from His creation).

b. polytheism/paganism -- There are many gods, different gods over different elements of creation.

c. atheism/naturalism/materialism -- There is no God, only matter exists. In the western world, (Europe, North America) this view is the biggest competitor to a biblical view. This is the view taught in 99% of our universities and public schools. But why? Does this view explain the world we live in? I emphatically say, "No!"

Weaknesses of naturalism:

- No God, no morality
- No God, no grounding or foundations for beauty, mathematics, love, charity, or selflessness
- No evidence at all in the fossil records of macroevolution (species in transition)
- No accounting for an ordered, fine-tune universe with a supposed origin of chance, chaos, and randomness

So why do so many people choose to believe naturalism when there is such a lack of evidence for it? Why do so many believe in naturalism if it cannot account for all these things we hold dear and depend on in life (love, beauty, morality, charity, etc.)?

Two reasons: **1.** Conformity to others (fear of man). **2.** Rebellion against God. Romans 1 says we suppress the truth in righteousness. What can be known about God is plain through what He has made, but we push it down.

It doesn't make sense intellectually to be an evolutionist (belief in naturalism, materialism). There's big problems. Here is the reason why so many adopt it. They don't step into it intellectually, they back into it morally. It is a way of trying to cast off the ties to having a Maker and Creator that we are accountable to.

John MacArthur -- "If God can be separated from origins then we can be separated from God. And if we can be separated from God, we don't have to worry about sin, guilt, and judgment. And we're free to do whatever we want."

I will not be so naive as to think that this doesn't describe someone here today. That may be where some of you landed prior to coming here this morning. You have adopted naturalism as your view of the world. But why? Is it because you know you're in rebellion against God with your life and you would rather convince yourself He is not here? Have you backed your way into this belief because you want it to be true, rather than the

alternative? Repent today. Turn to God today and acknowledge Him as the Creator and your Maker. Your access to Him goes through His Son Jesus. You must ask Jesus to forgive you of your rebellion and sins, and only then can you be reconciled to God your Maker. Only then will you be at peace with your Creator.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." It is not a spoiler alert to say that in Genesis 3, cosmic rebellion takes place. Adam and Eve sin against God their Maker. The created order is affected greatly by this sin. And the promise of God is that He will put the world right again. He promises to restore this broken world and a people from within it. That restoration comes through Jesus' finished work at the cross and His resurrection.

Listen to how Paul describes it in Romans 8.

Romans 8:19-23 -- For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Creation is groaning to be set free from this bondage to corruption that sin has brought upon it. So are we. The Holy Spirit in us is the first fruits of this coming redemption. It groans in us as we eagerly await our final adoption as sons. The creation waits with us. Christ will return and he will declare, **"Behold I am making all things new."** We say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come."

QUESTIONS:

1. What two foundational truths do we learn from Genesis 1:1? How is the Christian faith anchored in these truths?
2. How does Genesis 1:1 challenge or confirm the views you hold about the creation of the universe?
3. How does creation display the following attributes of God?
 - a. His aseity
 - b. His omnipotence
 - c. His sovereignty
 - d. His transcendence

- e. His goodness
 - f. His wisdom
4. How do we perceive God's eternal power and divine nature from creations (Romans 1:20)?
 5. How can Genesis 1:1 help you defend creation against atheism/naturalism/materialism?