

Genesis: Origin Stories, *In the Beginning*, Genesis 1:1, 1/7/24

It's a New Year, it's a great time to ask questions as a church like, "Where are we going?", "What is our focus?", "What are we hoping to see happen this year?" So let me remind you why we exist as a Church- **To Introduce people to Jesus Christ and help them follow him.** It's our mission, you see it above the doors as you entered into worship this morning. To pursue our mission we must be a church **On the Move.** Not stagnant, OK with the status quo, circling the wagons, looking back at the good ole days...we must be moving forward, empowered by the Spirit to take risks like the early church did in order to do what Jesus commissioned his church to do. There are three "On the Move Initiatives" over the next 3+ years: **Building our Faith-** Let me come back to that one....**Reaching our Community-** We are mobilizing our church to **demonstrate and declare the gospel of Jesus Christ (Feb-Aug Focus)** and **Shaping our Future-** We are repurposing our building to align with our ministry needs and introduce the generations to **Jesus** (you heard the vision for that in the November Congregational Meeting, more will be unfolding later this year on the details, timeline and funding). But let me go back to **Building our Faith-** We are building resilient disciples of Jesus in an increasingly post-Christian culture. What does "increasingly post-Christian culture" mean? It means that the **primary worldview of Western Culture is no longer mostly shaped by Christianity but by Modern Secularism.** It's the dominant worldview, hundreds of years. It's a story that seeks to **remove God** from society, the **locus of authority is now the self**, and because we are at the center, there is **no Truth, no absolute morality**, right and wrong, there is only what is practical for the individual or who is in power. It's a belief that the **universe is an accident** formed by time and chance, therefore, there is **no inherent meaning** or identity to the universe or humanity. The goal of life in modern secularism is to free the individual from the chains of societal, institutional and religious constraints to truly be free to **self-create your own meaning and identity** (with the caveat, as long as you don't hurt anyone else...according to whatever modern secularism defines as hurt). This can be summarized in self-actualization mantras like "You do you." "Do what makes you happy." "Don't let anyone tell you who you are, you are whoever you feel yourself to be." How is this modern story going? Is it creating a better, happier, more meaningful world?

[Title Slide] Becoming resilient disciples means believing and being able to articulate a better story of the world and humanity, not only because it's far more hopeful and beautiful, but because it's true and it works. And so we need to go back to the beginning of the story, to the origin stories in Genesis, because it's here we find answers to the most fundamental questions of the universe: Where did this all come from? Who are we? Why are we here? So welcome to Origin Stories and the book of Genesis! We will start slow in the first half of this series and then move faster in the second half in the Summer.

God begins his first words to humanity, ***In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*** There are no simpler and more profound words ever written or spoken. It's here we must start and camp out because as simple as it is, we must have a firm grasp on the implications of this opening to God's story. So let's break this down into two parts- ***In the beginning, God...***

The first four words of the Bible place immediate emphasis on God. And notice it doesn't say In the beginning God and everything else was created...God was already there in the beginning. He always was, before space and time. God is the only eternally uncreated creator. Which means that everything that exists finds its source in God alone. **God is our ultimate origin story.** The beginning of every question about our existence, purpose, identity, our bodies begins with God.

Modern secularism can't say "In the beginning God" and therefore every answer to these fundamental questions must find some other story. In the beginning, they may say, was space, dark matter, energy. Of course if you try to eliminate an eternally uncreated God you have a problem. Where did the space and dark matter and energy come from? And you can go back and back and back into infinite regression, but you still haven't answered the question. Until you acknowledge there must be some first uncaused cause.¹ Let's not too quickly slip past this reality. Modern secularism claims human sovereignty over our world, our time, our business, our body. But as Abraham Kuyper (KY-per) famously said "There's not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Lord over all, does not exclaim, 'Mine!'" We are God's tenants, and he is our landlord. The implications of which we will look at over the coming weeks.

created the heavens and the earth. Now when it comes to creation it seems many Christians get caught up in is the question of how...but I think that question is far less important than the why question. One author gives this illustration²- If someone gave you a Christmas gift and you open it up and it's some kind of machine. You don't first ask, "How did they get it to me, and how long did it take to make it and what materials and process did they use to make it?" You ask, "Why do I need this? What does this do? How do I use it so that I don't get blown up?" Why not how...I think it's the same with creation, the why is far more important than the how. But let's start with the how and say a few brief things about it, and then we will close with the why. There's so much we could say, volumes of books have been written on this but for today let me share two observations about **How God Created.**

He used words. 10x in Genesis 1, is the phrase "Then God said...and it was so." God spoke the world into existence. This stands in sharp contrast with both the ancient and modern perspective of how our world came to be. There are many ancient near eastern creation accounts, the *Enuma Elish* of Babylon for example. These origin stories say that the world came about by war between the gods, that the world was made out of the body and blood of a slain god, or another account says it came from the materials of a giant sea creature's carcass. As you read the accounts, it gives the impression that the world was an afterthought, a by-product in a way, of violence and unplanned chaos. And the modern origin story is that the world is less than an afterthought...it's complete randomness, an accidental collocation of atoms and energy. Nothing has actual meaning or intention. There is no inherent meaning in beauty or love or conviction: The late atheist Richard Dawkins said "When you look at certain scenery, you think it is so beautiful because your ancestors believed that there was food out there, and that

¹ Some language borrowed from Pastor Skip Heitzig message on Genesis 1. www.calvarynm.church

² Thanks to Tim Keller, message on Genesis 1:1-3, www.gospelinlife.org

particular neurological feature that helped them survive has now come down to you; and that's the reason you see it as 'beautiful.'" Or that love you feel for our spouse or significant other is just a *conditioned response* that our genes have programmed us to make propagate our DNA faster. Ladies, imagine you are out for a date at Longwood gardens, everything is beautiful and your boyfriend gets down on one knee and who are like, "Oh my goodness it's happening!" And he says, "I took you here because your monkey brain has a neurological connection here because it think there might be food and my genes have determined you are useful for the propagation of my DNA."³ Sorry Dawkins, she's not buying it!

Into the passive, accidental, cold ambivalence of both the ancient and modern story, the Bible says a resounding "No! It's not an accident!" The personal God spoke everything into existence and said it was good. Not as the result of chance but purposeful words. Not a passive byproduct of violence, out of intentional love. Not randomly but with definitive clarity. God said and it was so. That means the beauty of a sunset is filled with the intention of a great artist, it means that the love you feel isn't your biological DNA from your ancestors, it's your spiritual DNA from your loving creator! That's a better story, it works in reality, because it's true.

He used Order. Notice that Genesis 1 is incredibly structured and ordered in a symmetric and rhythmic way. Let me show you a slide **[Show Slide]** that shows patterned structure of the creation days.⁴ [Walk through it briefly]. Now, it's interesting to me- God could have created everything all at once, but the fact that God used segments of time, and a pattern means that God is a God of process. He values order and process, not only in creation, God used time and process to bring about the coming of Jesus in space and time to be our redeemer.

Now, once we begin to get more specific, lots of questions and debates arise. Are these 24-hr. days as a literal interpretation may suggest, are these epochs or long periods of time as a more flexible use of this word "yom" for day may suggest, potentially allowing for natural processes that could have taken millions of years? And then there's the question as to whether Genesis 1 is meant to be read as chronology of time, like science and history. Or is Genesis 1 meant to be read as ancient Hebrew poetry as some would say and in that case can use literary license to convey imagery without the burden of time. Or is Genesis 1 conveying something else completely, as John Walton would suggest in his book *The Lost World of Genesis One*, that this isn't primarily a material creation account, but about the functions of God's creation as a temple in which God dwells? And I've lost some of us just now in saying all this. Others I have made you uncomfortable for suggesting there may be multiple ways to interpret Genesis 1. So let me say a couple things. What comes to my mind is what God said to Job. At the end of the book of Job, God answers Job's questioning of him and God says, **"Who is this who darkens counsel by words without wisdom? Prepare yourself like a man. I will question you and you will answer Me."** And here's the question: **"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding."** I wasn't there...and neither were you, and God only saw fit to give us a few hundred words to describe it. **[BLANK SLIDE]** So it calls for humility. Secondly, my

³ Thanks to JD Greear for this idea! www.summitchurch.com

⁴ <https://www.thebibleinitiative.com/genesis-chapter-1>

exhortation is to not allow a rigid interpretation of the “How” of creation to become divisive. I know a bright young man who loves science who left his faith, because he was in a Christian community that told him the only faithful way to interpret Genesis 1 is a literal 24hr, chronological view and that the earth is 6,000 years old, and if you don’t believe that you can’t believe the rest of the Bible, and it shipwrecked his faith because he felt forced to choose science over the Bible. Personally, I don’t believe Genesis 1 was meant to be read as a modern science book. The purpose of Genesis isn’t a biology lesson. How many in Moses’ day or Abraham’s time would have understood it if it were? I believe true science (which is everchanging in its discoveries and theories) and faith ought to work together, not be pit against each other.

So in saying all that, I will disappoint some of you today. Because I’m not going to go into my perspective, honestly, I don’t think it’s the most important question for today. But I will write an article about my perspective that will go in the e-news this week so go read it for the 10 of you who care.

Far more important is **Why God Created**. Now we are going to spend the next three weeks answering this question so I’m not going to say everything. But I believe Genesis 1 gives us a hint to the answer of why. In Genesis 1:1-3, all three persons of the Trinity are involved in creation. Did you see it? *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² 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.*³ *And God said...* Who is the agent of creation? If you were with us for Advent in John 1, you know it’s the Word of God, Jesus the 3rd person of the Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all involved in creation. Notice in verse ²⁶ *Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.* Who is he talking to? Angels? But we aren’t made in the angels’ image. Who is he talking to? I believe the triunity of the Godhead is hinted at right at the beginning.

The Triune God existed in perfect love and relationship in eternity before creation. That means love was and is and always will be at the center of who God is and why he created. **Creation flows out the loving relationships within the Trinity.** God invites us to join the loving relationship within the Trinity forever, ultimately in the renewed creation when heaven comes down to Earth- Revelation 21-22. When God is creating the earth, sky, seas, plants and animals, over and over again he says **“It is good.”** This isn’t God’s inspection to make sure it checks out to his specifications. It is good! He’s speaking of his enjoying of it. Just like we delight in the splendor and majesty and power and beauty of creation, so did God at creation! And especially in the apex of his creation, humanity whom he made in his image...whom he says is very good!

This is our origin story...the problem is, Genesis 3 is coming. We live in a post-Genesis 3 world where the fall and our human rebellion marred God’s creation and the goodness and glory of it. Which is why deep in our soul what do we need more than anything else? **You need your maker to look at you and say, “You are good!”** Modern secularism tries to tell us everything is fine, there’s no such thing as sin, we are good. But we know better. We know ourselves. It’s why we run away and hide from God to get away from his gaze like the first humans. Or it’s way we try

to cover ourselves like the first humans with good things, either good deeds, good religion, or the good life of good things to make ourselves feel worthy. We look to a man or a woman, a parent or a boss or the internet to tell us we are good. All of it fails. How can we be restored so that God can look at us and say the words "You are good?" Our first origin story (birth) begins with God as creator, our 2nd origin story (rebirth) begins with God our redeemer. Genesis points to Jesus. The Word, who in the beginning became flesh. He was unmade on the cross, marred...so that we can be made new. Who became sin so that we might become righteousness of God. So that God can look at us in Jesus Christ and say to us, "Behold you are very good!"

Transition to Communion.

Other Works Consulted:

John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*

Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation, Genesis*

Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*

Guy Richard, *The Doctrine of Creation, an Essay*

Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Commentary*