

FGBC: Our Stories Begin: God at the Beginning

Genesis 1:1-2:3

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Welcome to Fort George. My name is Dan. I'm one of the pastors here. And welcome to a new school year. Lots of you are doing new things this year. And we are starting an important new series today.

We are going to spend 10 weeks in the book of Genesis. Now I don't want to over state this, but I believe it is fair to say that without understanding Genesis it is almost impossible to understand the Bible.

And that's because the Bible isn't a bunch of keys for how to live. It is a story. In fact it is *the* story. Another word for story is narrative. And big stories that explain the whole world are called metanarratives. And Genesis starts the Christian metanarrative.

So reading the Bible without understanding Genesis would be like trying to figure out one of those ciphers on the back of the Fruit Loops box with the wrong key. If the message was simple you might be able to do it. First word is 3 letters. □ Is probably "e", △ is probably "a", ~ is probably "t" and so the message is probably "eat more Fruit Loops. But with no key it might be a challenge to figure this out.

The problem is the Bible gives us a metanarrative. It's not cereal box literature. And so the key for the cipher is essential. And Genesis lays out the key. Genesis means beginning. In Genesis God lays out the way the world works – He lays out metanarrative. And there are 7 components to this story.

We are going to look at the first component today. And so open your Bible to the very first page, Genesis 1. If you didn't bring your own please use the one in the pew.

Now because of time I'm not going to read the full chapter, but I encourage you to do this. I'm going to read verses 1 to 5 and then skip down to verse 26.

[Read Genesis 1:1-5; 26-31]

So I've heard a fair bit of controversy surrounding Genesis 1 and you probably have too. This is one of those hot button texts that can get people really fired up.

And if I was going to sum up all the controversies I've heard about Genesis 1 I would do it by saying "People want to know how." So the question is was it six literal days, or was it 6 periods of time? Was evolution involved or wasn't it? Is there a time gap between verse 1 and verse 2? People want to know how it happened.¹

¹ Outline for this sermon adapted from Tim Keller's <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/the-song-of-creation-5205/> (Accessed September 6, 2018)

Now there is nothing wrong with how questions, except they aren't really the most important. Why is usually a much more important question.

So imagine I gave Spencer a Christmas present. I happen to know Spencer is into dirt biking. And he likes the outdoors. So imagine I bought him a food processor.

Spencer is probably not going to respond by saying "Wow thanks. How long does it take Hamilton Beach to make this model?" Or "How many different kinds of vegetables can I cut up with this beast?"

Those are real questions, but he isn't going to ask them. Instead he is going to look at me and say "Why Dan. Why did you buy this for me?"

And similarly while it might be interesting to know how God did what He did, and how much time it took Him to do this, what we need to know is why God made the world. Why did He make it the way He did? Why do we exist?

Those are questions that are going to make a difference in your life. And it turns out Genesis 1 wants to answer those questions. It isn't interested with "how."

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Now here is how I know this. You may have heard people say that Genesis 1 and 2 contradict each other. People say that because in Genesis 1 and 2 we get two creation accounts not one.

So in Genesis 1 it says there are 6 days and God created different things on each day. And people are the final creation. In verse 26 it says God made people, male and female, on day six just before taking a day off.

But then Genesis 2 verse 5 starts this all over again. It says:

[Read Genesis 2:5]

What?! I thought creation was finished? And then in verse 7 God makes Adam – which is Hebrew for man – and puts him in the garden and gets him to take care of it. And he does this for a bit and then God says "It isn't good for man to be alone." And so God makes all the animals parade in front of Adam one at a time. And Adam examines and names each one of them but none of them are that sexy. And so after all that God puts Adam to sleep, takes a rib out of his side, and makes "Whoa-man!"

Now either Adam got started at really early in the morning, or it took more than a day to work the whole garden and name every animal. And so people say, look, Genesis 1 and 2 contradict. But they don't. These two chapters are two versions of the same story. One is a poem or a song, and the other is historical narrative.

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Now let me give you a couple examples of this so you know what I'm talking about. In Exodus 14 Moses leads Israel through the Red Sea. And then in Exodus 15 Moses' sister Miriam sings a worship song about this incredible miracle. It's the same story, but first we get history, and then we get a song.

Something similar happens in Judges 4 and 5. In Judges 4 – it's a PG 13 story – if you are under 13 you need to plug your ears because it's too violent and you are going to get nightmares.

In Judges 4 Deborah delivers Israel from Sisera. He's the evil commander of Canaan's army. She lures him into her tent to rest after he has been fighting all day. Gives him some warm milk. And then after he falls asleep drives a tent peg through his temple – nice lady.

But then in Judges 5 we get a worship song about God using Deborah to deliver Israel.

Judges 4 is history, Judges 5 is a song. And different literature needs to be read differently. So no one has a problem when Deborah sings

The stars fought from heaven. The stars in their orbits fought against Sisera.
(Judges 5:20)

And no one has a problem when Miriam sings:

[God] with the blast of Your nostrils
The waters were gathered together;
The floods stood upright like a heap;
The depths congealed in the heart of the sea. (Exodus 15:8)

Did the stars really fall on Sisera? No. Did God really snort air out of His nostrils to split the Red Sea? Well God is a Spirit and doesn't have nostrils, so probably not. But the Bible isn't lying – everyone knows songs are different from history text books. The point of music is to give you an experience.

Well Genesis 1 is a song, and Genesis 2 is history. Songs are full of repetition and specific structure. And that's what we get in Genesis 1. This song isn't designed to answer the how, it is designed to help us feel the why.

Now there's lots I could bring out here, but just one point on repetition and patterns in Hebrew poetry. In English our poems rhyme, but not every language works like this. In Hebrew poetry is all about structure. And we get some very interesting structure here.

So on day 1, 2 and 3 God makes buckets, and on days 4, 5 and 6 God fills those buckets. So on day 1 God separates light from darkness. And on day 4 God fills that bucket with the sun, moon and stars. On day 2 God separates the waters below and above with the sky. And on day 5 God fills the water with fish and the sky with birds. On day 3 God makes dry land, and on day 6 God fills the land with animals and people.

And we already saw how this is different from Genesis 2, so we need to start looking at what Genesis 1 is trying to convey. And there are a couple big things.

It's first desire comes out right at the beginning. "In the beginning God." God made everything. So this means it wasn't chance, it wasn't random forces interacting with each other. And it also wasn't Atum the Egyptian god who created himself by sheer force of will and then vomited and sneezed other gods into being. And it wasn't Brahma the Hindu god who popped out of a lotus flower that grew out of Vishnu's naval.

No, YHWH is the Creator. He is behind everything that exists, and He has always been.

But God didn't just create everything, God created it all out of nothing. So all God does to create is speak. In verse 3 we get "And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. There wasn't anything there before, but at God's word it sprung into existence. We call that ex-nihilo – out of nothing. And this is what we get over and over again in the song of Genesis 1.

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Now every metanarrative seeks to give meaning to the world. And every metanarrative contradicts every other metanarrative. So Genesis 1 flies in the face of the modern metanarrative we all know. People today believe that everything that exists came into being by chance out of something that was already there. This is the scientific metanarrative. And the belief here is that only what you can touch and study is real.

Now the modern metanarrative is fixated on the "how" because there is no "why". Life is just survival and getting the most toys. Salvation is living the most comfortable life you possibly can. But Genesis 1 contradicts that. It starts with "why." It says "In the beginning God."

But Genesis 1 also flies in the face of the ancient metanarratives. So think the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman stories. They all say creation came out of something – it came out of the war of the gods. So the winning gods built the world out of the dead ones. Or there was this sea monster, and a god killed it and build the world. Creation came out of something.

Eastern religions like Hinduism say everything comes out of the consciousness of Vishnu. The big different between this and modern thought is that for Hinduism none of what you can see or touch is real, it's all an illusion.

And so the goal of these metanarratives is to escape this bad world. So you give yourself to meditation hoping to gain enlightenment. Put your desires behind you. Stop loving this world because it is evil and not real. Salvation is found in escape.

But Genesis 1 contradicts this. It says "No" to the Ancient Eastern belief that this world isn't real or good. And it says "No" to the modern belief that only what you can see and touch is real, and so nothing matters.

And on and on the challenge goes. Every metanarrative contradicts every other one. But that doesn't make them all equal. So many worldviews say we don't have to care about the earth because it is bad or because it isn't real or because we are going to leave it behind and go to heaven. But the Bible's metanarrative says "no" to all of these. 7 times in Genesis 1 God saw that what He had made was good or very good.

Now it gets broken – that's next week – but broken means it can be fixed. Bad means it needs to be discarded. But the Bible's story is a story of fixing not discarding.

So at the end, in Revelation 21, heaven comes to earth. The New Jerusalem descends, Jesus comes back, and God is going to live with His people here on a redeemed earth.

So yes two men are going to be working and one will be taken and the other one will be left. Yes two women will be grinding flour at the mill, one will be taken and the other left. But it isn't the one who is taken who goes to heaven. That passage in Matthew 24 makes that clear. The verses just before these ones say:

When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day. In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes. (Matthew 24:37-39)

So let me ask you, in Noah's day was it better to be swept away or left behind? In the Biblical worldview the world is good but broken in need of redemption. And God restores it. That's why God's people care about the earth.

But at the same time, we aren't materialists. The world is good, but we don't live for stuff. We don't live for money. We don't live for sex. We don't do this because while these things are good, they aren't ultimate. They aren't the answer to our "why?" Our why is God who made all these good things to point us to Him.

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There is one more why I want to bring out of Genesis 1. And that is why did God create people at all? And the answer comes in verse 26. It reads:

[Read Genesis 1:26a]

Who is God talking to here? Well some people have supposed He was talking to the angels, but we aren't created in the image of angels, and so that doesn't work.

Rather, what we get in this verse is a picture of an eternally relational, loving God. God is a trinity. He is one God, but He has three persons. God is Father, Son and Spirit. Now Genesis 1 doesn't come right out and say this, but it hints at it.

So in verse 2, right after finding out that "In the beginning God" we learn that the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters – that's verse 2. Now this word "hovering" is a

very specific word. It's used of female birds who are taking care of their young. So the hen hovers over her eggs and hovers over her chicks.

What this means is the Spirit isn't the Star Wars force, it is a Who that is hovering over creation. He is taking care of it.

The hint continues: Next, eight times in Genesis 1 it reads "And God said." In the Bible God speaks creation into being.

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Now when I speak not much happens. But this isn't true for God. God's word is powerful. Now sometimes we think the Bible is God's word, but it isn't. God's word is the "who" that the Bible points to.

So in John 1 we read:

In the beginning the Word already existed.
The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He existed in the beginning with God.
God created everything through Him,
and nothing was created except through Him.
The Word gave life to everything that was created,
[Then] the Word became human and made His home among us. (John
1:1-4;14)

Jesus is the Word of God. And so when God spoke the reason it had power was because Jesus was doing what God said.

So God was in community with Himself before creation. God has been Father, Son and Spirit in perfect love and community forever. And He creates humanity in that image.

Now here's why this is important. In Islam Allah was by Himself for eternity prior to creation. And so while His creation is great it is not primarily one of love and community. There is no love or relationship when you are by yourself.

But in the Bible when God created us "in Our image," it is something totally different. He creates out of love and relationship. So He created us, not because He was lonely or bored, but because He wanted to share the joy He already had with beings who could enter into His love.

This is the why. This is why we exist. We exist to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

And so this is why God speaks or sings to create. Genesis 1 is a song. God seeks to relate. He seeks to communicate. He seeks to draw you and Me into Himself and His

joy. And when this happens His glory increases because we worship Him. And our joy and enjoyment increase because He shares Himself with us.

Friends, we were created to join in creation's song of joy. Psalm 19 says:

The heavens proclaim the glory of God.

The skies display His craftsmanship.

Day after day they continue to speak;

night after night they make Him known. (Psalm 19:1-2)

Creation is singing God's song, but its music, as beautiful as it is, is meant to play in the background. People are meant to carry the melody. But things are broken. When sin entered the picture it broke the possibility for us to sing in joy like we were created to do.

And so "the Word became human and made His home among us." And He did this because Father loves, and Spirit cares, and God wants us to share His joy. And so Son took our sin upon Himself in order to free us from it and enable us to sing once again.

Now how does this work? How do we sing this song? That's the right "how" question. We start singing God's song when we accept what Jesus did for us. We put our faith in Him. And we give ourselves to enjoying Father's love – God loves you!

And when we realize this we start living our lives for His glory – we do everything for His glory. Whatever you eat, you eat it for His glory. Whatever you watch on TV you watch for His glory. Wherever you work, you work there for His glory. When we do this we are singing the song the Trinity has sung forever. And this is where abundant life is.

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So choose your metanarrative. You can believe that only what can be touched is real and give yourself to seeking happiness at Walmart. But while God's stuff is good it isn't meant to be worshiped. And you are going to come up wanting.

Alternatively, you can believe this world is bad and so deny yourself everything you want in a hope of escaping, but you were built to enjoy and so you are going to despair.

Or you can try Jesus' way. He wants you to win. He wants to fill you with the worth and meaning that He has enjoyed with Father and Spirit forever. He wants you to join in singing His song of love and relationship. So brothers and sisters, sing because your good Creator is pointing you to Himself and His joy.