

# The Story That Makes Sense of our Stories

## *“Beauty”*

Genesis 1:1-2:3

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### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 01)** Why do we hunger for beauty? That is the question we are asking today. Two weeks ago we began a new series that I am calling “The Story that Makes Sense of our Stories.” We have all been born into the gigantic story of this universe. But what is this gigantic story we find ourselves in?
  - We’re all trying to make sense of it. The difficulty is that people give all kinds of different interpretations of what this big story is. For instance, some say we’re here by chance, others that we were created by God, and still others say we are all part of endless cycles of reincarnation.
- So, what we’re doing in this series is comparing and contrasting the various stories people believe and asking the question, ***“What story makes the best sense of the universe in which we find ourselves?”***
  - To hear the Christian story, we’re going back to the first three chapters of Genesis. These chapters are so helpful because they were literally written to answer this question. They weren’t written in live time as the events occurred. Genesis claims to be God’s revelation to Israel and the world to help them understand the giant story they found themselves in.
- Each week we are looking at a particular subject and this week I want to look at what story makes the best sense of beauty.
  - So, let’s talk about three things: the question of beauty, the secular story of beauty, and the Christian story of beauty.

### THE QUESTION OF BEAUTY

- Let’s start things off by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 02)** **The question of beauty.**
  - When I talk about beauty today I mean that deep joy inside of you that yells to your friends or family, ***“Come outside and look at the sunset!”*** And then you spend 20 minutes watching that sunset, even though it doesn’t help you to accomplish anything. But you don’t care. It’s not about accomplishment. It is just about experiencing beauty and the wonder and joy that come with it.
  - When I talk about beauty I am talking about that part of you that loves music. There are songs that bring tears to your eyes. There is music that seems to transport you to a higher realm.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 03)** You see, we all believe in beauty. We all love beauty. And we all seek after beauty.
  - We don’t go for walks in concrete parkades. We go for walks in the forest or along the ocean.
  - We don’t just build houses to keep us dry and warm. We build houses whose lines and shapes are pleasing to the eye and then we paint and decorate the inside so that we live within something beautiful.

- Why are we like this? Dogs don't care about interior design!
- All this becomes even more interesting with the fact that we are never fully satisfied with beauty. The German philosophers and poets called this "Sehnsucht" (ZEN-sookt). It's a hard world to translate. It means to long or to crave for something that you can't even really identify. You don't experience sehnsucht when you're sad; you actually experience it when you are most happy.
  - Perhaps at the end of movie where all the characters move into some happily ever after. You feel complete happiness, but in that happiness you also experience a sweet ache to go to such a place.
    - It's like there is something past the music, past the joy, that you are reaching for. It's a longing. It's a sweet ache for something more. But you're not even sure what it is.
- The question I want us to ask this morning is this: **(SHOW SLIDE 04) What story best makes sense of the fact that we love beauty, seek beauty, create beauty, and long for a beauty that we cannot seem to find?**

#### THE SECULAR STORY OF BEAUTY

- Well, let's move to our next point and consider **(SHOW SLIDE 05) the secular story of beauty**. How does the secular story of the universe make sense of beauty?
  - The most common version of the secular story goes like this: there once was nothing, no God, no spiritual realm, nothing. The universe exploded into being at the Big Bang. And then through a long process of evolution, life emerged on the earth.
    - It follows then that everything about what it means to be human, including our love of beauty, can and should be explained in material terms because within this story there is no spiritual realm; there is no soul. There is only physical stuff.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 06)** Yet, if this story is true, if we are only material beings, then it is very hard to understand our love of beauty.
  - For instance, I remember talking with a married man in his mid-20s who was an atheist. He firmly believed that that the material universe is all there is and everything must be explained through science. We started talking about romantic love. What is romantic love? To his credit, he was entirely consistent with his beliefs. And so he said that love is nothing more than a chemical reaction in one person's body that draws them to another person. It's part of our evolutionary history to help perpetuate the human species.
    - To which the question is then ask, **"Have you said that to your wife?"**
- Men, when you say to your wife, **"You are so beautiful"** do you simply mean, **"the chemicals in my body are mixing in such a way right now that the neurons in my brain are creating an impulse that is drawing me to you so that together we can help perpetuate the human species?"** I sure hope you don't say that.
  - Of course, science is correct to say there are neurons firing and chemicals mixing, but don't you believe there is something greater going on here than mere biology and chemistry?

- Or think about music. On one level, science teaches us that sound is the movement of molecules in the air that causes the little hairs in your ears to vibrate, which then sends signals that your brain interprets as sound.
  - But is that all that music is? There are songs that you listen to that bring tears to your eyes. There are songs you love that seem to transport you to a higher realm. Do you believe that it is nothing more than a neural physiological reaction to the movement of air in your ears?
    - And what of sehnsucht? That longing and sweet ache is nothing more than feelings. It's not a real longing in the sense that there is actually something that can satisfy it.
- So, we all find ourselves born as human beings in this gigantic universe. One thing we know about ourselves is that we all believe in beauty. We long to experience beauty. We seek beauty. What story of the universe best makes sense of these facts?
  - So far, we have looked at how the secular story makes sense of it. The secular story says since everything is material, everything including our love of beauty, can and should be explained in material terms.
    - We've said that this story does make sense of some of the mechanics of it, but it does not seem to answer the joy, the wonder, and the awe we feel with beauty.

#### THE CHRISTIAN STORY OF BEAUTY

- So now let's turn to look at **(SHOW SLIDE 07) the Christian story of beauty.**
  - How does the Christian story make sense of the fact that we love beauty, seek beauty, create beauty, and long for a beauty that we cannot seem to find?
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 08)** For this we are going to look at Genesis 1:1-2:3. Most of us entirely miss the point of Genesis 1. It's because we immediately sidetracked into controversial questions like, how old is the earth? Are these creation days literal 24hr periods? Does Genesis 1 fit with evolutionary ideas? And most importantly to me when I was a child, where are the dinosaurs?
  - All these questions have their place, but they completely miss the big point of why Genesis 1 was written and what we are to get out of it. This chapter is meant to teach us that God exists and that God created everything, including us.
    - But more than that, it is intended to make us stand in awe at what an incredible and beautiful world God has made for us to have as our home. And all this is meant to lead us to trust him and worship him singing along with Louis Armstrong, *"What a wonderful world."*
- This is what I want us to see this morning. Even the way it is written is meant to bring together this beauty and wonder. For instance, in the original Hebrew language in which it was written, the entire chapter is dominated by sevens. The number seven in the Bible is the number that represents perfection.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 09)**
  - **Gen 1:1 = 7 words**  
**Gen 1:2 = 14 words (7x2)**  
**"God" = 35 times (7x5)**

**“Earth” = 21 times (7x3)**

**“Heaven” = 21 times (7x3)**

**“It was so” = 7 times**

**“It was good” = 7 times**

- You’re not reading a textbook. You’re reading a literary masterpiece. Genesis 1 is a work of art that is meant to point to the Great Artist who filled his world with beauty.

➤ But I am getting ahead of myself. Let’s back up and develop the Christian story of beauty starting at verse 1. **(SHOW SLIDE 10) In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.**

- So, the Christian story begins by declaring that God exists and that God created everything. That doesn’t tell us much about beauty yet. It tells us God is powerful. But maybe he is the kind of God who doesn’t care about making things that are beautiful and attractive. Maybe he only cares that they are useful and practical. Well, let’s continue on and find out.

➤ Here’s what we read in verse 2. **(SHOW SLIDE 11) The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.**

- We have now zoomed in on the earth itself. Genesis 1 is not so much about the universe, but about the earth. But here we find the earth in a state that cannot support life.
  - This phrase “without form” is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to a landscape that is inhospitable and dangerous. The word “void” isn’t saying there was nothing there. It means the earth was there but was empty of life. So, the picture here is of the earth covered in water, but there is no life; it is uninhabitable.

➤ Yet there is also a sense of anticipation. The Spirit of God hovers like a bird over this primeval ocean, preparing to act. And then we read that God roll up his sleeves and gets to work on these raw materials.

- What we see is that the creation story has two parts to it. First, God forms the earth in order to be able to support life. And then second, God fills the earth with life. Here’s what it looks like. **(SHOW SLIDE 12)**

<b>Forming</b>	<b>Filling</b>
Day 1	Day 4
Day 2	Day 5
Day 3	Day 6

➤ In days 1-3 God takes that which is formless and he forms it. And then in days 4-6 God takes that which is empty and he fills it with life.

- Or as one of my seminary professors, Darrell Johnson, says, in days 1-3 God builds the house of this world and in days 4-6 he furnishes it.

➤ So here is the summary. **(SHOW SLIDE 13)**

<b>Forming</b>	<b>Filling</b>
Day 1 – light	Day 4 – lights

Day 2 – firmament: sky and seas	Day 5 – Inhabitants: birds and fish
Day 3 – dry land and vegetation	Day 6 – land animals and humans

- In day one God creates light. In day two he creates the sky.
  - In day 3, God, like a sculptor, raises up dry land and enables the dry land to produce vegetation. All of these things are acts of forming.
- Then on days 4-6 God fills what he has formed. On day 4 God goes back to the work of day 1 and brings forth the lights. The sun and moon are not called “sun” and “moon” but the greater and lesser lights. This was to teach ancient people that the sun and moon are not goods to be worshipped but lights to guide us.
  - In day 5 God goes back to his work in day 2 and he creates fish to live in the waters and birds to live in the sky. And then in day six God goes back to the work of day three and brings forth living creatures to fill the earth and he creates human beings.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 14)** Now we are starting to see what kind of God our Creator is. Notice that he does not just create a world for us that is useful and practical, though it is certainly that. He goes far beyond this. He creates a world for us that is attractive and beautiful. When it comes to filling the world with beauty, God is over the top about it; it’s extremely excessive!
  - For instance, day 5 talks about how he fills the sea with fish. He could have just created five different species of fish. But from what we have counted there are over 20,000 different species.
    - **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** Terrifying sharks, **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** little minnows, and **(SHOW SLIDE 17)** strange looking fish.
    - He could have made them all black and white. **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** But he creates fish with all kind of colours. **(SHOW SLIDE 19)** **(SHOW SLIDE 20)** There is so much beauty in the fish of the sea that we create aquariums to go look at them and pay to go on snorkelling trips in far off places.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 21)** Genesis 1 is saying that yes God exists and yes God is powerful. But even more, he is a God of beauty and pours out this beauty into what he creates. This is further emphasized by a phrase that comes up over and over and over again.
  - When God finishes his work each day he steps back and examines what he has created. And what does he say? Does he say, “**Task complete**”? No, we read, “**And God saw that it was good.**” God is like an artist who steps back from his work, smiles in enjoyment, and says, “**That’s good!**”
    - There is a place in the book of Job that refers to the angels, who are called “sons of God” watching God create. It’s like God says to them, “Watch this!” and then he forms a mountain out of the sea and Job 38:7 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 22)** “**all the sons of God shouted for joy.**”
- The end result of Genesis 1 is that God creates a home for humanity that not only can support and sustain life, but one that is crammed full of beauty.
  - Earth is a rare jewel in the larger universe.
- This was powerfully brought home to me when I watched the movie *Gravity*, **(SHOW SLIDE 23)** which stars Sandra Bullock and George Clooney and won 7 Academy Awards.

- The story is about two astronauts stranded in space just above the earth. The whole movie they are trying to get safely back to earth. The entire movie shows how hostile space is to human life. No air. No food. No water. Everything is trying to kill you and space is so black. You watch this for almost two hours until in the final scene Sandra Bullock's escape pod crash lands in the ocean just off the coast of an island.
- She swims up through the dark water and bursts through the surface. And for the first time in a few hours you see real colour. There are green hills in the distance. She breathes deeply. An insect flies above her head. She swims to shore through green tufts of grass sticking up in the shallow waters.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 24)** She lays her face on the sand, grabs a handful of sand and pulls it close as she chuckles to herself. Then she stands up. The music comes to a crescendo and she puts her arms out wide and looks around at the earth in thanks and in awe. And the movie ends.
    - What wonderful world!

#### WE WILL SEE HIS FACE

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 25)** So, let's pull all of this together and add a few final pieces. How does the Christian story make sense of the fact that we love beauty, seek beauty, create beauty, and long for a beauty that we cannot seem to find?
  - The Christian story says that beauty exists because God exists and created a world filled with beauty. Furthermore, Genesis 1 goes on to explain why we love beauty so much. The answer is that God created us to be like him. Genesis 1:27 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 26)** **God created man in his own image.**
    - So the reason we love beauty is because we are like God who loves beauty.
    - The reason we love to make beautiful things is because we are like God who loves to make beautiful things.
    - The reason we experience delight and joy in beauty is because we are like God who takes great delight and joy in beauty.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 27)** But what about the longing for a beauty that we can hold onto but that we can't seem to find? What about sehnsucht? The Christian story says the longing you experience is actually a longing for God.
  - All the beautiful things in this world are pointers to a higher beauty. They are all meant to point you to the source of all beauty, which is God himself. This is why Augustine, the 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian leader, wrote, **(SHOW SLIDE 28)** ***"Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."***
    - The Genesis story will go on to show us why we have this restless longing within us. The answer is that we all reject God to seek other things. We have turned away from the source of all beauty and tried to satisfy our longings in smaller beauties. As Romans 1 says we have exchanged the glory of our Creator for created things.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 29)** The reason we can't find that satisfaction is because the beautiful things of this world were never meant to fully satisfy us. Ultimate beauty is

not in the art, the forest, or the song. All of these beautiful things are like the rays of the sun, but they are not the sun itself.

- God our Creator is the source of all beauty and yet we have all turned our backs on he who is all beauty. What will God do with his image bearers who ignore him and reject him and worship his created world instead?
- To our utter amazement the Christian story goes on to say that God does not reject us, even though we've rejected him. Rather, our Creator works to bring us back to himself.
  - How does he do this? The Beautiful One laid aside his beauty and came to our world. The eternal Son of God took on human flesh and became a man. And we read these words in Isaiah 53: **(SHOW SLIDE 30)**
    - **He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.**
- When Beauty himself visited our planet, how did we treat him? Did we marvel at him and worship him? No. Isaiah 53 continues: **(SHOW SLIDE 31)**
  - **He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**
    - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 32)** Why would Jesus, who is beauty itself and the source of all beauty, do this? To free us from the ugliness of our sin and the ugliness we have made of the world God has given us. On the cross Jesus took our sin, all our ugliness, upon himself in order that anyone who believes in him might be forgiven.
- And then our total amazement the Christian story ends with God fulfilling all our longings for beauty. In the end, Revelation 21 says that God is going to renew this earth, which he gave to us as our home. Then heaven, which is God's home, will come down and merge with earth and God, the source of all beauty, will dwell with his people forever.
  - That future new earth is described as a place without pain or suffering or death. It is a place where all our good longings are fulfilled. My kids love to ask me what all this will be like? Most of my answers goes something like this: We don't really know. But here's what we do know: this earth, even in its fallen state, is so amazing. The future new heavens and new earth can't be less than what we have here. Look at all the colours. What if God will create new colours? Music here is amazing, but the music of that world will make Beethoven's best songs sound like a 5-year old playing Hot Cross Buns on the piano.
- And it is then that, what I think are, the best five words in the Bible will come true. In Revelation 22 we read that of all the wrongs being made right, the news heavens and new earth, and then in Revelation 22:5 it says, **(SHOW SLIDE 33) We will see his face.**
  - God is beauty. And we will look upon Beauty itself. In this life I have looked at many beautiful things that have filled my heart with joy, that have left me awestruck in wonder, and that have brought tears of joy to my eye.
    - I've seen my bride walk down the aisle.
    - I've wept tears of joy when I first looked upon each of my 4 my children.

- I've stood awestruck on the edge of the Grand Canyon.
- I've snorkeled with tropical fish in the Great Barrier Reef of Australia.
- I've marveled at the great works of art in the Louvre in Paris and stood in the great cathedrals of Europe.
- All of these things have filled my soul with joy in their beauty. But they are all pointers. They are all like the rays of the sun. I long for a beauty that will not fade, a beauty that I can hold on to, a beauty that will satisfy the deepest longings of my soul.
  - And the promise of the Bible is that because of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, a day is coming when all those longings will be fulfilled. We will see his face.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 34)** So what story do you think best makes sense of the fact that we love beauty, seek beauty, create beauty, and long for a beauty that we cannot seem to find?
  - The invitation of the Christian story is to come to Jesus and ask him to forgive you. The promise of the Christian story is that however does this will find all their longings fulfilled. Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.