

Beginning

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[0:00] We are beginning a new sermon series this morning in Genesis, so I want you, if you have your Bibles with you, to open up to Genesis chapter 1. Genesis chapter 1, and we're going to read all the way down through chapter 2, verse 3.

We're going to read this same passage for the next five weeks. It's going to take us five weeks to cover all of those verses, but I want us each week to be reminded of the big picture of creation.

So we're going to start in verse 1 of chapter 1, read down to chapter 2, verse 3. I want you guys to stand with me as we read together. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

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. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.

And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day.

[1:10] And God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse, and it was so.

And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening, and there was morning, the second day. And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.

And it was so. God called the dry land earth. And the waters that were gathered together He called seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the third day. And God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night.

And let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years. And let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth. And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars.

[2:37] And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens. So God created the great sea creatures, and every living creature that moves with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth. And there was evening, and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds, livestock and creeping things, and beasts of the earth according to their kinds. And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds, and the livestock according to their kinds.

And everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness.

[3:53] And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.

And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done. And he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

[5:11] Now, Father, by your Spirit, take these words that we've read and make them come alive in our hearts. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys be seated.

So I've got a new fashion accessory this morning that I haven't had in a really long time. I went out, and I spent a lot of money at Walmart on this \$12.98 cheap watch.

And I'm trying to get used to wearing a watch. I haven't had one in a long time, because you really don't need a watch today. You've got a cell phone in your pocket, and you can check it anytime you want. But the height of laziness is the unwillingness to reach into one's pocket and push a button to look at the clock.

So I bought a watch this week, so now I can see clearly what time it is and that you guys are going to be in here for a long time and miss lunch later on. I actually bought two of these watches because they're so cheap I could afford two.

I got two of them, and I disassembled one of them. Actually, I paid somebody \$5 to disassemble one of them. That's the truth. And I have all of these pieces of this watch. It's the same exact watch.

[6:16] And, of course, you all know, and it's not complicated to know, that as many times as I might want to shake this bag up and rearrange the pieces and toss them around, there's not going to be a time when I finish shaking this bag full of gears and parts and things.

That's an actual image of some of these real actual parts. There's no way in the world that these things are going to, on their own, assemble themselves into something even resembling slightly what I'm wearing on my wrist.

because we all know that when we look at something that is as intricately designed as a watch, and nicer watches are more intricately designed and have more gears and more moving parts, but we all know when we look at something that bears the marks of design, it must have a designer.

It must. It must have been made by someone. No one concludes that any machine with moving parts put itself together or that it just came together because the winds blew in the right way and things happened in just the right way for it to come together.

I could shake that bag a million times. I could shake that bag a billion times and it would never form together into a watch because things that bear the marks of a design have a designer.

[7:34] And you can look around the world or you can just look in the mirror and you can see the marks of design written all over everything around us. In fact, there is a molecular biologist by the name of Michael Behe and I want to read you something that he has to say about things that you and I can't see on our own, things too small, individual single-celled organisms.

Let me read you what he has to say. He says that at the tiniest levels of biology, the chemical life of the cell, we have discovered a complex world that radically changes everything on which Darwinian, that is evolutionary, debates must be contested.

And then he says on another part of his book, he says, as biochemists, we have begun to examine apparently simple structures like cilia and flagella. These are tiny little parts on single-celled organisms, some of them.

He says, we've begun to examine apparently simple structures like cilia and flagella and discovered that they have staggering complexity with dozens or even hundreds of precisely tailored parts.

So these tiny little pieces of tiny little organisms themselves have dozens or he says even hundreds of precisely tailored parts. And then he says, as the number of required parts increases, the difficulty of gradually putting the system together skyrockets.

[8:57] Darwin looks more and more forlorn. Darwinian theory has given no explanation for the cilium or flagellum. The overwhelming complexity push us to think it may never give us an explanation.

What he's saying is that when you look at the world on its smallest scale, it is so intricately designed that it cannot have come about by random chance.

There must be a designer behind even the smallest parts of our world. We fool ourselves if we think that these things just happen.

And yet, I don't feel the slightest bit of need as we walk our way through these opening chapters of Genesis to try to convince you that there is a designer. I don't feel the slightest bit of need to try to convince you that God exists.

Partly because Moses, who wrote the book of Genesis, and the rest of the first five books of the Old Testament, feels no need to try to convince us that God exists.

[10:05] He assumes it. He says, in the beginning, God. Not followed with an argument for the existence of God. Not obsessed with attempting to prove that there is a God.

He assumes God's existence. For Moses, the problem was not whether or not God existed. The issue was, which God is the true God?

What is the Creator like? What has He shown us about Himself? And then even apart from Moses' purpose in writing this book, we have within us the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 1 where he tells us that the creation screams out to us that there is a God, that God really does exist.

Listen to the Apostle Paul's words in Romans chapter 1. He says, What can be known about God is plain to them. That is, non-believers. Because God has shown it to them.

For His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

[11:18] Paul says that the knowledge of the existence of God is written upon the heart of every person created in His image. The most ardent atheist knows in his bones that there is a God, though with all of His might, he denies that.

He knows it. I don't feel the need to try to convince you that God exists because I believe what the Scriptures say that we know, all of us know, He exists.

My concern is the concern of Moses to ask the question, what sort of God exists? What is He like? What has He revealed about Himself? And in regard to creation, what has He revealed about that creation?

How did He create the world? Why did He create the world? These are the concerns that confront me as I look at Genesis chapter 1. You know, the Israelites, they never needed Moses to prove to them that God existed.

They were certain that there was a divine being. After all, they had seen the plagues rain down in Egypt. They had witnessed the Red Sea part as Moses raised his staff.

[12:30] And yet, those same people, knowing without a shadow of a doubt that God exists, that He has redeemed them out of the land of Egypt, yet they stand at the foot of a mountain and throw their gold together and create a golden calf and proclaim that this is the God that delivered us out of the land of Egypt.

Their problem was not that they didn't believe that God existed. Their problem was that they were always, always tempted to identify the true God with a false God.

Always tempted to confuse the two. And I think that Moses wrote this book, Genesis through Deuteronomy.

I believe that he wrote this book and he wrote these chapters that we're going to look at over the next few months. He wrote these to show us not that God exists, but to show us who He is, what He has done, and why He has done the things that He has done.

So we're going to approach the Bible, and in particular we're going to approach these first few chapters of Genesis with those sorts of questions in mind. Who is this God who made all things?

[13:41] What is He like? What has He done? And why has He done those things? So take a look at me with the opening verse of this book and of the Bible as a whole.

We are told that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

I want you to underline or highlight the words heavens and earth. The heavens and the earth. Because that's the way in Hebrew that you say everything. If you want to describe the entire universe, if you want to describe everything that exists other than God, the entire created physical universe, the phrase that you use is heavens and earth.

So that if you turn over a few chapters in the book of Genesis where Abraham encounters a rather mysterious figure named Melchizedek, the king of Salem, priest of God most high.

In that passage, God is referred to as the possessor of heaven and earth. It doesn't mean that God owns the sky and he owns the land and that's all he owns.

[14:57] It means that God owns everything. Everything that exists, he owns. It's all his. So when Moses begins the Bible by saying that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, what he intends to tell us is that God made everything that exists, everything that we can see and everything that we cannot see, God made.

In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us that he created all things whether thrones, dominions, or authorities. Visible, Paul says, or invisible.

All things were created by him and for him, Paul tells us. He created everything that exists, seen and unseen.

In fact, maybe if the Bible were being written today, rather than saying heavens and earth, it might say something like, in the beginning God created matter and energy. Any kind of phrase that we might have that would be a good way of summarizing everything in the physical and spiritual world that exists aside from God himself.

God made. He simply made it all. The theological term for this understanding of creation is *creatio ex nihilo*, which is just a fancy Latin phrase that means creation out of nothing.

[16:22] It means that God did not take something that already existed and simply form and fashion the universe. It means that there was nothing other than God himself.

Nothing. And then he created everything out of nothing. God doesn't create the way that people create. When we talk about people being creative or so and so created this or that, what we mean is they took preexistent materials, wood or metal or stone or whatever it might be, and they formed and shaped them into something useful or something beautiful.

That's not what God did. Nothing existed apart from God and then he created everything. Everything out of nothing, which stands in stark contrast to the world views that have surrounded us and that surround us even today.

So for instance, if you consider what has been, it's now kind of beginning to fall to the wayside, but what has been for the last hundred or so years, the dominant theory about where the universe came from, which is the Big Bang theory, even the Big Bang theory does not teach that the universe came out of nothing.

The Big Bang theory teaches that before the universe, all matter and energy was concentrated into an infinitesimally small speck, I guess you would say.

[17:53] Or, if you've ever heard the theme song to the show The Big Bang Theory, what does it say? 14 billion years ago, something, something, a hot, dense state.

That hot, dense state is the state at which The Big Bang Theory says everything existed in that form until the universe came into existence. Which means that in eternity past, you don't find God alone, you find all matter and energy already in existence condensed into a state which physics tells us is actually impossible.

But it's not unique to modern scientific theories to believe in some eternally existing matter. This has been the alternative to the biblical worldview throughout history.

You can look at the ancient Babylonians and we have a creation account that has been dug up by archaeologists and preserved from ancient Babylon called the *Enuma Elish*, which teaches that the gods themselves, because they believed in lots of gods, that the gods themselves as well as the rest of creation came out of, arose out of, just sort of a watery substance that existed before anything else.

Just this watery sort of substance that existed. And first the gods came out of that and then the gods waged violent, disgusting war with each other and out of their conquests and death came humanity in the earth and all these sorts of things.

[19:20] It's a strange story, but it begins the way many creation stories begin with some eternally existing matter of some sort. Same thing is true of a lot of the ancient Greeks.

You can read the ancient Greek poet Hesiod and he believed that and he taught and many of the Greeks believed that before even the gods existed, much like the Babylonians, before their gods existed, he taught that there was this sort of chaos, this just chaotic existence and soup of things that existed and it had no form.

It didn't come together until the gods somehow arose out of it and began to put things together. Whether you're looking at scientific theories or ancient myths or ancient religions, no matter what you're looking at, the world has assumed by and large that the universe in some form has existed forever.

In some form. And the Bible comes along and says, no. The universe has not always existed because this world is not ultimate.

God is ultimate. And in eternity past, there was God. And when God chose to create, there was everything.

[20:47] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Everything that exists owes its existence to this eternally existent, independent God.

Everything. And yet, that's not all that the opening verses of Genesis would have us to know about God. That's not all they would have us to know at all.

Notice how God goes about creating and shaping and forming the matter that He's created in Genesis 1. 1. Notice verse 3. And God said, let there be light.

Verse 6. And God said, let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters. Verse 9. And God said, let the waters under the heavens be gathered together. Verse 11. And God said, let the earth sprout vegetation.

Verse 14. And God said, let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens. Verse 20. And God said, let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures. Verse 24. And God said, let the earth bring forth living creatures.

[21:54] Verse 26. Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. Over and over. And God said, God spoke, and things come into existence.

God speaks, and the world begins to take shape. If you ask, how did God go about creating all these things? The answer is, obviously, God created all these things by the power of His Word.

Psalms 33, verse 6. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. 2 Peter 3, verse 3.

For they deliberately overlooked this fact that the heavens existed long ago. And then he says that the earth was formed out of water through water by the Word of God.

By the Word of God. Everything exists. Everything around us exists by the power of God's Word.

[22:59] And the Bible doesn't leave us to guess at the nature of that Word of God. In fact, the Gospel of John, I want you to turn there to the Gospel of John, chapter 1.

John opens by quoting the first three words of Genesis. and then he deviates from them to illumine for us what is this Word through which God created all things.

John, chapter 1, verse 1. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. So the Word is somehow distinct from God, the Father.

The Word was with God and yet the Word was God. So the Word is distinct from the Father and yet the Word is God. We're entering the realm of mystery here. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him and without Him was not anything that was made that has been made. Move down to verse 14. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth.

- [24:17] Verse 17. The law was given through Moses, grace, and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the Father's side. He has made Him known.

When we read in the Bible that all things were created by God through the power of the Word of God, what we are to understand is that all things were created by the Father through the Son.

Moses doesn't leave us in Genesis chapter 1 and the rest of the writers of the Bible don't leave us to guess at who this God is.

Not only do we have Him creating through the Word who is His Son, we see the Spirit of God in verse 2 hovering over the waters. so that Moses is making distinctions for us.

He's helping us. He's helping us the more we read and the more we think about what we're reading in these opening verses of Genesis. He's helping us to see who this God is.

- [25:31] He is not like the gods of the Babylonians or the gods of the Greeks or the gods of the Egyptians. He did not arise out of some pre-existent matter. He created all things. He alone is God.

There is only one. There are no pretenders. There are no wars waged in Genesis chapter 1 or Genesis chapter 2 between the gods. There is one God.

He's making distinctions. Understand who this God is. He's not the God of the Egyptians. He's not a God that you fashion out of gold. He's not a God that you imagine in your mind.

He's not a God like the gods of the Canaanites, the Babylonians, the Greeks, or anything else. He is the eternal God of the universe.

And then not only that, but Moses begins to give us these hints and the New Testament helps us to see clearly what those hints are pointing toward. But this God has existed eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- [26:37] Father, the Word of the Father, and the Spirit of God, eternally existent and active in creation. When John says, in the beginning was the Word, what John means is that in the beginning, at that point, if you can call it time when time didn't exist before that, at that point, the Word already existed.

He never came into existence. He was never created. He is one with the Father. This is who the Creator is.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Which helps us to begin to answer that last question that I mentioned earlier. Why did God create the universe? Why did He make everything?

And more specifically, why did He make human beings? Why do we exist? exist? Because if all you have is verse 1, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, which any Muslim could affirm, which any adherent of Judaism could affirm, which in fact, almost any monotheist, that means almost anyone who believes in one God could affirm Genesis 1.

If that's all that you have, then you might assume that this God for eternity past was lonely and lacking and He needed someone to love and be loved by in return and that's why He made the world and put people in the world so that He could love and be loved.

- [28:13] And yet Jesus, when He prays to His Father in John chapter 17, says, Father, restore to me the glory that I had with you before the worlds existed.

Restore to me the glory that I had with you before the world even existed. Which means that before the beginning, in eternity past, God was not lacking.

God was not in need of someone to love. The Father and Son have loved one another perfectly for eternity past. God was not in need of someone to love Him in return.

The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus is the exact representation of God. He is the perfect reflection of the Father's glory. God has no needs.

He's not lacking in any way. He did not create the universe. He did not make Adam and Eve or you and I because He desperately needs to love and be loved.

[29 : 25] So then why? Why did this God create all things? We read about it earlier as we were singing. The heavens declare the glory of God.

Or back to Colossians chapter 1 not only were all things created through Christ but all things we are told by the Apostle Paul were made for Him. We exist for the praise and glory of God.

Why did God create all things? Because He's infinitely worthy of all praise. And so He creates a universe that exists to exalt Him and praise Him and magnify His glory.

Here's the good news. The good news in all of that is that He has made us in such a way that our highest delights and our greatest pleasures are to be had in praising Him and loving Him and beholding Him.

He could have created us in such a way that we're designed to create Him and we don't enjoy it at all and yet God has ordained that the highest pleasure we can ever experience is to glorify and praise Him for all eternity.

[30 : 51] We think sometimes, what am I going to do forever after I die if I go to heaven? What am I going to do?

Am I going to get bored? I mean, even if God gives me a job for how many thousands of years or millions of years can you do a job, no matter how great the job is, how long can you do it before it just gets boring?

We think that way. And yet, the Bible tells us we have been created, we have been designed in such a way that we experience ultimate satisfaction and happiness in the presence of God singing His praises.

And it is an ever-increasing happiness that will never end. For God's children who do enjoy eternity with Him, there will never be a time at which they say, I'm exhausted and worn out from all this worship.

It can never get any better because the next moment is more satisfying than that moment. And the moment after that is better than all previous moments. So that for all eternity we will experience in the presence of our Creator and Redeemer ever-increasing joy and happiness.

[32 : 04] happiness. Or as the psalmist says, at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. This book, this account of creation, demands that we believe.

It demands that we have faith in a God who has existed forever. God who made all things from nothing and a God who did that through the power of His Word.

And a God whose Word took on flesh and dwelt among us and died on the cross for our sins and rose again so that we might have the hope of living forever in the presence of Him who gives us eternal pleasures.

This book, these opening chapters of the Bible, demand that we believe and trust in that kind of a God. But more than that, this book demands that we give Him the honor and the glory and the praise that He deserves.

He created all things, the Bible tells us. By His will, all things exist. exist. And because of that, Revelation 4, 11, all glory and honor and praise belong to Him alone.

[33 : 31] You want to know what life is about? You want to know what God's doing in the creation of things? He's saving the people for Himself.

And someday He's going to restore the universe for Himself and all things, all things will be gathered together in the praise of our Maker.

All things. Except those who do not trust in the Word made flesh. Oh, they will glorify Him because He will be glorified in the just punishment of unrepentant sinners.

He will receive all glory and praise. But only those who trust in Him will have ever increasing joy forever in His presence. What does the universe exist for?

The glory of God. Why do you exist? You exist for the glory of God. What does your future hold? If you trust in Jesus, ever increasing joy in His presence.

[34 : 37] Let's pray. will God will do it. God will do it. God will do it. God will do it. You did not inspire Moses to write these words for nothing, Father.

Convinced of that. Nor did you inspire him to write these words so that we could wrestle and wrangle over issues of how can we prove God exists and how can we show without a doubt that you're real.

These words are written so that we might know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. And I pray, Father, that as we spend the next few months pouring over the opening words of your book, that you would direct our eyes to Jesus and we'd be changed.

I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.