

# Genesis 1:1–2

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[ 0 : 00 ] the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verses 1 through 2. Please stand for the reading of God's word. 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. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good morning, and welcome to Christchurch Chicago.

And it's good to be with you today. I'm refreshed a bit, having been out of the pulpit for three consecutive weeks over the holiday, but thoroughly enjoyed Jim White and Jeremy Meeks and Bing Nee as they took us through that early work in Isaiah and just really walked through our Advent so well and opened the new year.

Let me pray as we get underway together. Our Heavenly Father, we now pray that these words read today in our hearing would be all that we require as a church family for this week and strengthen each one according to their need.

[ 1 : 43 ] In Christ's name, amen. Well, welcome to a new year series from the book of Genesis, particularly chapters 1 through 12.

As Bing mentioned earlier today, we'll be in this series for about five months, and we're just calling it Getting Started. It's an appropriate title for the book of Genesis, and it's an appropriate time for us to look at it.

So many things getting underway. There are four reasons that I think lie behind the answer to the question, why this book at this time for this church?

Why Genesis? And why now? In one sense, I want to use the next few minutes then to introduce to you the series that we'll be in even long before introducing to you the text that we'll look at today.

But there are, as your pastor, four reasons that the Lord has laid on my heart and in conversation with Pastor Nee concerning the book of Genesis at this time in our church's life.

[ 3 : 05 ] First, Genesis provides a foundation for how Christ's church thinks. It's a foundational book for the way we think about the world that we live in, why we are here, what our individual and our collective purpose is.

It's a book that helps us understand in the community in which we live and be able to verbalize what went wrong and why things are the way they are and whether or not God intended at the beginning some eternal and exciting purpose that he is unfolding.

Genesis provides a foundation for how we think about everything. Let me put it this way.

We're doing preaching series in anticipation of arriving in Woodlawn sometime this summer in public services. And all the preaching from the Sermon on the Mount series through our introduction moment moment into that building into that building is to prepare us as a people.

And in preparing us as a people, the Sermon on the Mount certainly gave us what a vision for Christian community ought to look like.

[ 4 : 43 ] The Sermon on the Mount is a vision for us on what Christian community looks like. And Genesis is a foundation for why we think the way we do about all things in life.

Second, Genesis not only provides a foundation for how the church thinks, but it is connected to the one that we follow.

We just walked out of a series about how we follow the words of our Lord. And only two and a half months before this day, we had finished a series on John, which opened with the words, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.

The Word was God. And we began to see that Jesus is connected to Genesis. There's something about Genesis and Jesus.

It's not just a foundation for the way we think about the world or our purposes in it. It's a book that actually is connected to the one we follow.

[ 5 : 52 ] There's a dynamic relationship between Genesis and Jesus. In other words, that what God gets started here, He finishes with Him.

And what you're going to see even in this text today is that in finishing with Him, He was there all the way back when He got it started. So our own faith as a church in Christ ought to be elevated.

Third, why Genesis? Why now? These chapters, 1 through 12, address the frenzied, disordered, chaotic events that are colliding upon us week by week.

It is incredibly applicable to the time in which we're living. Let me just, just give me again, a word, a moment of pastoral privilege.

It is impossible to keep up from the pulpit week by week the new cycles of any given day, let alone the seven days that preceded this week.

[ 7 : 06 ] And I'm well aware that as you wake up and go about your week, you are at times wondering what will the pulpit have to say to the pew concerning what took place today.

And I feel that for the last year or more, preaching has almost been like standing on the tectonic plates of our globe.

And they are shifting and the crust of the earth is moving and life before us is heaving with weight almost unbearable.

In this past week alone, think of all the things that will be addressed on this day. Yeah, this book, Genesis, and these chapters, one through 12, address them all.

And so we can slow ourselves down and hear the word of God as it applies to the frenzied pace of the disorder and the chaos that confronts our times.

[ 8 : 18 ] I mean, just think about some of the things that are in your mind. The global pandemic, the racial tension, the collapse of multi-ethnic ministries at local levels, the miscarriage of justice, the changes in gender, the movements in the last week on how we speak about things in our body politic.

There's not a family in our midst that doesn't wrestle with and need to think through areas of sexuality or violence, murder, war, genocide, natural disasters.

And I'm telling you, they are all here. They're all here. And so a book of Genesis allows me to sleep at night as a preacher rather than feeling that I have to come week by week and answer the questions that you are asking.

We can, in an expositional way, allow the questions and answers that God's word is giving to meet the needs of the world in which we are living.

And so I am thrilled about this aspect of the book. And I think it meets the need of our church.

[ 9 : 58 ] It's one thing to try to answer every question that's in your mind. It's another thing to come to the church expecting that God's questions are more important than ours.

And maybe there's something here today for me that will be surprising and yet the very thing that I need. Genesis. First, it's a foundation for how our church thinks.

Second, it's connected to the one we follow. Three, it addresses the frenzied chaos that confronts our times. And four, it will help us come together as a family even during months where we are separated.

This is a great concern of mine that Christ Church Chicago, having launched itself online, has yet, months in now, been able to sit around the table as a family.

It is something that is lamentable. And yet, this book will help us come together as a family until we are able to have that reunion which will actually be our first ever face-to-face corporate gathering.

[ 11 : 14 ] Now, you might say, family? And the book of Genesis? Yes, family. Genesis is about family as much as it is about anything.

It gives you God's first family. It actually, in the first 11 chapters, is intended to demonstrate to you that we are all in a family, the humanity family, as it were.

There are no fewer than five genealogies, five family trees that emerge in the first 11 chapters. And not only that, from chapter 12 and onward, you're introduced to Abraham and the whole story then moves from this first family to our universal family to one particular family, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, through whom all families are to be blessed by God.

Do you want God to bless you? It will happen as you come to understand family. And the book of Genesis is that for us.

Now, I know that's not an introduction to a sermon. That's a personal word of pastoral privilege to introduce to you the series and to tell you why we are where we are.

[ 12 : 46 ] We need a foundation. There's not a young person in our church or a parent or a university student that doesn't need to know why they think the way they think about the world in which we live, what went wrong and what God is doing.

There's not a person in our midst that doesn't need to begin to understand the dynamic relationships between Genesis and Jesus. There's no one here that wants to be in a church where the contemporary issues that are coming at us at such a frenzied pace are not addressed and now we can do it expositively.

And as you sit at home in isolation or we sit here we weary few face to face we can come to understand what it will be for us to be a family.

And so I don't apologize for taking six, seven minutes to introduce a five month series. But if those four reasons provide an introduction to an entire series the first two verses of Genesis and I would encourage you to open it up and have it before you here or in your home the first two verses of Genesis give us an introduction to the opening chapter.

Let me reread the text because it's so brief and we're able to do it. 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.

[ 14 : 18 ] these are the introductory verses to the first chapter. They are telling you what he is going to talk to you about.

And I'm going to argue from this text that you and I should think that the God who created all things intends to be celebrated by all people.

the God who created all things intends to be celebrated by all people. How do I get there?

First, God. In the beginning, God. Notice, God is the subject of the verb in the first sentence.

God is the subject of almost all the verbs in the first chapter. God is the subject of Genesis and all the subsequent books that we bring together as our Bible.

[ 15 : 32 ] He's here by word for. God is not argued for. He's assumed. Don't lose sight of this.

Thirty-five times in this chapter alone, God is named. Now, this is interesting.

Let me apply the exposition of God. It's interesting in this way. Our typical reading of Genesis 1 arrives at a very different center of gravity.

And it does so because we mistakenly bring our questions to the text rather than allow the text to inform or answer the questions it would have for us.

Our typical reading of Genesis 1 is that we should be expecting questions that relate, well, at least 15 years ago. It's much less engaged today. Issues of evolution and science, and in my day growing up, where did the dinosaurs come from?

[ 16 : 46 ] But even all of these things, this war that existed between the world and science or the church and science, those are much less in the background today.

Now you turn to Genesis to understand things about gender and sexuality and what does it mean to be made in the image of God and all of the reasons for which we are coming to the chapter and the answers we are looking to have explained from the chapter are really arising from our own questions.

But we can miss the main subject. Interestingly, Genesis 1 is not about cosmology and to seek to find answers about cosmology from here is about as useful as trying to set up a bed you purchased from Ikea by opening a manual that's meant for computer programming.

I mean, when you open up the manual for computer programming, of which I never intend to open one, but if you did, my assumption is it would not help me put the bed together.

And I would not only be not helped by what I had hoped for it to answer, it would be useless in regard to what it actually wanted to communicate.

[ 18 : 06 ] And that's what happens to us when we read Genesis without God at the center. He's first.

He becomes everything. And if you've missed Genesis 1 indicating to you that God exists, you're not ready to go any further. Let me just read a couple of things from the scriptures so that you can allow God's word to wash over you.

Psalms 90 verses 1 and 2, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, wherever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

God exists. The Bible affirms, asserts, it doesn't argue for, it asserts and affirms God exists. Later in the Bible, in the book of Hebrews, it will be said that it is by faith that we believe that God created the world.

And so this is foundational to our thinking as a church family. Welcome to Christ Church Chicago. We believe God exists. Why do you believe God exists?

[ 19 : 22 ] Because the Bible, by the fourth word in our own translation, asserts his very presence. And that same Bible, which we take by faith to be the revelation of God for our lives, about himself and our relationship to him, likewise indicates in Psalm 14 that only a fool would assert by faith that God does not exist.

And so this is foundational for us. God. I told you that I was arguing that the God who created all things intends to be celebrated by all people, so God must then in this sermon give way to created all things.

And indeed, that's what the text already indicates for you. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.

God created all things, and he would have you know that this morning. Take a look at your own Bible, the words the heavens and earth.

We might be led to read that as the sky and the ground upon which I walk. But that would be an incorrect reading of the text.

[ 20 : 56 ] The heavens and the earth is a phrase brought together in the scriptures that is meant to speak of the totality of things.

It isn't the sky and the ground, it's all things. It reaches from one end to the other, from the heavens and the earth.

And this is what we believe, that God is the creator of all things. Indeed, the word created here is only used of the activities of God in the scriptures, in the Old Testament.

Now, what does this mean then for you and me? Well, this confronts what philosophy undergrad classes would call philosophical materialism.

The Bible is distinct from a view that thinks that there is an eternality of matter that might coexist with the eternality of a divine force or being.

[ 22 : 00 ] It actually goes further than by implication and indicates that even the evil that you see in the world today and the existence of evil and the apparent permanence of evil from all that we know had a beginning outside of God subsequent to all the things that were created by God.

that there was a cancerous work that took place independently of his own beauty and good. It will puzzle people forever.

But the thing is this. We are aware that we are not dealing in Genesis with two dueling eternalities. As though you have the God of verse 1 and then the matter of verse 2 and then the way Philo would have tried to think about it, how do these collaborating eternalities do something that creates a world in which we live?

There's no, this is not a yin and yang thing here in the scriptures. Really, verse 2 begins with the Hebrew word and untranslated. And so it really is in a sense in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the earth when it was created by God was formless and void and darkness over the face of the waters.

And when he created it was like this. This was his first step in the work of creating. To create an earth that is yet without form and yet unfilled.

[ 23 : 44 ] I think of how to explain this by way of an illustration. It would be like a child who is in my dining room floor probably even right now creating houses with Legos.

Legos. It isn't as though those Legos were preexistent from all time and God decided to make use of them and make the earth.

No, he, at the time he created, when he created the heavens and the earth, he created it in a formless way and it was unfilled. In other words, he brought all the material to the building site necessary but the frame of the created order was not yet in place and he does both actions.

He creates, unlike anything you and I can do, this formless, unfilled, darkness, matter and then from that he will, through the rest of the chapter, bring order to it.

Genesis is about how God brings order to all of creation and how he can bring order to your own life. There's a New Testament connection here. I told you that at times we'll see in the book of Genesis Jesus in relationship to him.

[ 25 : 16 ] And in Colossians 1, you can see very clearly that not only is God doing something at the beginning here that is finished in Jesus, but by the time you understand the New Testament, you begin to read that Jesus, who is the finishing work and the divine imprint of God, was the one who got it started to begin with.

Verse 15, he's the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

And he is before all things and all things hold together in him. This is a stunning truth that informs the foundation of our thinking.

The one we follow who is the finished work of God for our salvation is also the very author of all that got underway.

He has been active with an eternal plan from the very outset. It makes me love him more, treasure him more.

[ 26 : 33 ] In fact, if Genesis is about God and Jesus is the fullness of God and we follow Jesus, then think of it.

You and I will one day see God. You will see God. Spurgeon put it this way.

He does not say, I shall see the saints, though doubtless that will be an untold felicity, but I shall see God. It is not, I shall see the pearly gates, I shall see the walls of Jasper, I shall gaze upon the crowns of gold, but I shall see God.

This is the sum and substance of heaven. This is the joyful hope of all believers. It is their delight to see him. Let me just, let that settle on you this week as you begin to read through Genesis for yourself in anticipation of being ready for Sunday and the questions God will have for us.

God created all things through the word of God who was with him in the beginning. Our Lord, the one we follow.

[ 27 : 48 ] God created all things through the Word. We will see. You and I will one day see the one who has the power by his word to create from nothing all that is, to hang the stars in place, to control the rising of the sun tomorrow and the setting of it today.

You will behold the subject of Genesis 1. God created all things, but then finally that he should be celebrated by all people.

Without leaning into the rest of the chapter, which would fully answer this claim, verse 2 ends this way, and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

By those words, we learn that God is spirit. spirit. And yet this God who is spirit, we have already understood, is also in union with God incarnate, the one Jesus, who speaks of the one who is his father.

What am I saying? That by the presence of the word spirit of God here and the way that his spirit is handled in the scriptures. God is personal.

[ 29 : 35 ] God is Trinitarian. We believe at Christ Church that God is relational. That God is not an impersonal force.

That you are not subject to fate. That the actions or events of the coming week, which will disappoint your hopes for the year laid out last week, are actually all things being ordained by him for an eternal and an exciting purpose.

How do I get there? That this personal God created all people that he should be celebrated by us. If the very beginning of verse 1 puts the Bible in contrast to atheism in the beginning of God, and the middle part of our verses put the Bible in distinction from philosophical materialism or the eternality of evil, this last verse about a spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters, which we're going to see beginning to unfold next week, it's almost like a hummingbird of anticipation.

There's only four other times this word hovering is used in the scripture, and it's translated through the fluttering of a bird. That God is now moving and active over this which is formless and unfilled with intention, and we know him to be personal.

We should be, by the end of verse 2, anticipating the activity of God. That's what it wants to conjure up within you. God not only exists, God has some anticipatory fluttering about him in regard to what he intends, which ought to be celebrated.

[ 31 : 32 ] And in a day in which we live where there's so little for you to celebrate, it's because we have our eyes on the wrong thing. We need our eyes on the Spirit of God who flutters over all of the created events, ordaining and orchestrating an eternal will which would excite us to no end when we come to learn that it makes us members of his family in whom we will dwell with him forevermore.

If you don't have an expectation in these verses of wanting to know what comes, then you've missed what these introductory verses are meant to do. I don't know what questions you came with to this day.

I don't know what issue of the week you wanted me to address. I don't know what will befall us before the morning light. But this I know from these verses.

There is a God who created all things with the intention of being celebrated by all people. And he will explain to us how he goes about it through this book for all time.

Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, as we enter into five months together as a family that is dying for reunion, as we long for a day where we will sit with one another, even with members who joined our family that we have never met, as we labor through the first part of this year with questions that fill our mind and events that unfold before us that knock us off center.

[ 33 : 28 ] May this book provide a foundation for how Christ's church thinks. May this book, for many, connect them to the one they are to follow.

May this book allow us the rational pace through exposition to address the chaos of our time, may this book bring us together as a family.

May it bring our hearts to the celebratory act of praise for a God who created all things.

We ask it in his name. Amen.