

In the Beginning, God...

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[0:00] It's my privilege to preach Genesis 1 on a day like this when we can really see how beautiful and amazing God's creation is. And for the next three weeks, we're going to do Genesis 1, 2 and 3.

And the series is called Foundational Things, because looking at Genesis 1, 2 and 3 together in order, it will tell us foundational things about who we are, about the world we live in and about the God who made it all.

Foundational things. And you've got a handout there. And please keep your Bibles open at page one. A big thanks to Andrew, who read a huge passage this morning. I don't watch a lot of TV, but there's one program I never miss.

It is my guilty pleasure. I think I'm ashamed of it. The TV show is called First Dates. Has anyone else seen it?

No, I'm on my own. The premise of the show is this. They hire out a restaurant in Sydney and every couple there, they fill it with couples and every couple is on a first date.

[1:14] And they put cameras and microphones there and so you can see how the dates get on. The ladies in the show, they always disappear to the toilets halfway through the date.

And they ring their mum to tell them what this bloke is like. The ladies are always looking for just a nice fella to settle down with. Except this one girl who said, there are 81 things a bloke needs to have for me to like him.

I'm 81. She is still single. The blokes though, the blokes come in two varieties. So the first variety is a former bad boy.

He's now in his 30s. He realises he needs to settle down in life. But the other type of bloke is a really young chap who literally is on his first date ever.

In this day and age, this young chap doesn't know whether he's supposed to pay for the lady after dinner. But he is under strict instructions from his mum to be a gentleman.

[2:16] This young lad is hoping against all hope that the girl likes him back. And at the end of each date, they interview the couples together to find out how they get along.

It's sensational TV. It's called First Dates. I don't know what that does to my reputation, but there you go. I rang another couple in the church whose initials are Glenn and Naomi Cullen.

I don't know, where are they? There are they. And I asked them what they thought of each other after their first date. And Naomi told me this. She said, I remember where we were. I remember we sat at table 13.

I remember that he ate chicken mondial and I ate vegetarian pasta. But I can't remember what Glenn was like on our first date. Well, our passage today is like a first date with God.

Now, obviously not romantically. But our passage today, Genesis 1, is like going on a first date with God. And here's the reasons why. We're meeting God for the very first time.

[3 : 24] This is the beginning of the Bible. And so he's introducing himself to us. Secondly, God takes us out somewhere. Now, I don't know where, if you were hanging out with God for a day, where in the universe you'd like to be taken.

Well, he takes us back in time to the beginning when he created it all. And thirdly, God really wants us to get to know him. He wants to tell us what he's like.

And so as we get to know him, my aim is that we will see how to live well in his world. I'm going to say that again. As we get to know God from Genesis 1, our aim is that we will see how to live well in the world he made.

In other words, a good understanding of Genesis 1 will underpin much of our lives and the things we believe. A good understanding of Genesis 1 makes sense of the world we live in, even though it was written thousands of years ago.

And we're going to finish with you guys doing some work yourselves. Now, I realize in a church like this that lots of you have read Genesis 1 before. In the service before, this one, someone said to me, when they realized we're doing Genesis 1, they rolled their eyes.

[4 : 40] I know lots of people have heard Genesis 1 preached and taught before. But could we imagine, just for today, that we have never met God before?

Can we pretend that we're meeting him for the very first time, that he's introducing himself to us? Could we do that? Good. Well, there's the handout. And if you keep your Bibles open at page 1, we won't be able to go through all the verses.

There's just too many of them. We'll just pick up some of the main points. This is point 1. Now, the first thing God wants to tell us about himself is verse 1. In the beginning, God.

That is, God is the origin of all things. In the beginning, all there was, was him. Was God. In verse 1, he claims that he created the heavens and the earth.

Heavens and the earth is a Hebrew expression, which means totality. In the beginning, God created totality, everything. Without him, all we have is verse 2.

[5 : 46] Now, the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep. And so in verse 3, God said, let there be light. Light and there was light.

Now, I don't know how powerful your words are. Do you find that people listen when you speak? What sort of day would you have if all you did was speak? How successful would that be?

Bring me my breakfast. Bring me my shoes. Take me here. Take me there. How successful a day would that be if all you had were your words? But God spoke light into existence.

It's not as though God was at the Gold Coast on holidays and he saw light in one of those souvenir shops and thought, oh, light looks pretty good. I'll take that back home with me. He spoke light into existence.

He created it. It's extraordinary. Notice in verse 4, God saw that the light was good. Throughout this passage, every time God creates something, it is good.

[6 : 48] He stands back and takes pleasure at how good it is. Verse 5, God called the light day and the darkness he called night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And I don't know if you remember your first day at work. Usually they start you slowly, don't you? And you shake a few hands. You go around and have a look at the office and where you're going to work just till you're on your feet.

Well, on God's first day on the job, he created day and night. It's extraordinary. We're going to skip to the fourth day where he made sun and moon.

Verse 16, God made two great lights, the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. Notice right at the end, I love this bit. It says, he also made the stars.

I wonder where you've traveled and seen an incredible night full of sky, sorry, sky full of stars. I wonder where you've seen them. I went to Wales once, camping in the Midlands of Wales.

[7:51] And there was a meteor shower against this sky full of stars. It was incredible. Well, just like a footnote, after making sun and moon, God says, would you like stars with that?

God also made the stars. It's incredible. And notice that Genesis 1, this is the important bit. Genesis 1 is very structured. It's structured around days.

So each section is a new day. It begins with, let there be. It finishes with, there was evening, there was morning. There are repeated lines. Everything was made according to its kind.

He saw that it was good. I wonder, here's a question for you. Do you know what type of literature is broken into even sections where there's a consistent rhythm and repeated refrains and a chorus?

Where every section finishes on the same note. Do you know what kind of literature that is? It seems to me that Genesis 1, our first date, has a very musical or poetic feel to it.

[8:54] And while that means Genesis 1 isn't a science textbook, nor does it mean this is a metaphor that can be explained away as though it didn't happen like this. And that is really important because lots of people try to make these chapters of Genesis say something the author never intended.

They get bogged down in arguments about evolution and dinosaurs, about seven literal days or how old the earth is. But I don't think this passage is concerned with that. Because the main emphasis is God himself.

32 times he's mentioned. And every time it's with a verb. God created. God saw. God called. God made. God blessed. God does all the doing.

No wonder it says, in the beginning, God. You see, whatever type of literature this is, the point is it's about him. You see, maybe, maybe the creation took seven 24-hour periods.

Maybe it was seven other periods. Either way, I don't think the author is concerned with the hows. But rather the who's.

[10:05] Who's doing all the doing. And on the sixth day, God outdoes himself. Have a look at verse 26. Then God said, Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. This passage tells us that humans, people, are the pinnacle of God's creation.

It's only after we are made that things are not just good, but verse 31. God saw all that he made and it was very good. You see, unlike every other aspect of creation, we are the only ones made in God's image.

We are inherently privileged and dignified just because we're human, regardless of our worldly status. Lots of people debate what the image of God is, but I think verse 26 is very helpful.

Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. Why? So that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky. Verse 28 as well. God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number.

[11:29] Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the sky. And I don't know how you would rate mankind's performance at ruling in God's image.

I guess lots of people love the fact that we have dominion, but the main idea here is that we don't get ahead of ourselves. And so to help us keep our heads in, I put a questionnaire at the bottom of your handout.

Obviously, this questionnaire is officially sanctioned by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Not. But it's a little census form. And so what I want you to do is take a minute to fill in this census form.

Put your name there and tick the box. What status are you? Either you are God or something made by God. They're the options of Genesis 1.

Have you all done that? How many men tick the God box? Put up your hands. Men are quite naughty like that. You see, that is the whole point of Genesis 1.

[12:33] The universe is divided in two. On one side there is God. And on the other side are all the somethings made by him. Everything we can name, anything in totality, as the Hebrews say, is just another something made by him.

And what that does is take us to the end of the verses. That's pretty much all there is. There's a few other things to say, but that's pretty much the end of the verses. And you'll notice this. There is no command for us.

There is nothing for us to do. We are sort of bystanders in this chapter. And that makes Genesis 1 quite a tricky passage to apply. But remember, good application is as much about our understanding as it is about us doing something.

And so to help us apply it, here's the question. What can we understand about God from these verses? After our date with him, this is our second point.

So obviously, God is the creator. He's the beginning. It was pretty obvious. We all saw that. But as we saw him in action, did we learn anything else about him? What about power?

[13:48] We saw how powerful he was. That he can take a formless void and make it teem with life. He said, let there be. And it was so. The Bible's test of power, even at this early stage, seems to be how well can you create something?

Are you powerful enough to do it with a word? What about order? This passage shows how much God cares about order. Order is huge in the Bible.

Three days to form things. Three days to fill things. He created in controlled days. Everything made according to its kind. He didn't create a frog and put it in space. He didn't make a star and put it in the ocean.

Everything ordered and according to its kind. Notice he created an order in the hierarchy. So there's God on top and then people and then animals and then plants.

Order is very important to God. We saw his goodness, didn't we? Everything he made was always good. In fact, he is the source of all goodness.

[14:52] Things are only good and very good because he made them. Creator, beginning, powerful, ordered and good. That is quite some first date to go on.

It's quite overwhelming. And so to help us process all that, what I want to do in point number three, what I want to do is something very practical. I want to show you how Genesis 1 makes sense of life in the world that he has made.

I want to show you a few areas of life that are underpinned by a right understanding of Genesis 1. So idols, first part of life, idols. Moses wrote this book, which means the first readers were the Israelites when they came out of Egypt.

People there, they worship the sun and the moon. Very huge, powerful things. They governed the day, they governed the night, they controlled and marked off the seasons. But Genesis 1 says both of them are just something made by God.

We don't worship the idols of Egypt, but we're prone to worship other idols as well. Maybe it's our money or esteem. Maybe it's our comfort or our property.

[16:06] We might make idols of ourselves and how clever we are. Maybe we worship our children. Genesis 1. In Genesis 1, the test of an idol is this.

Can the idol say of itself, in the beginning, I? The way verse 1 says, in the beginning, God. Remember our census.

You're either God or something made by him. This passage helps us to see all our idols, whatever they are, as just somethings. This passage helps us to throw them away and put our trust back in God.

That's idols. Let's keep moving. Disasters. I don't know how your year has been. This is the time when we sort of look back, isn't it, on the year that was. Have you had a year you'd like to forget?

Would you like to just put a line under this year and get us to 2020? Were there things this year that were too much for you to handle? Did anything this year leave you in pieces?

[17:07] What about the disasters we'll face next year? This passage says that anything we have faced or will face is something made and controlled by God.

Our health, our happiness, jobs and homes, our religious freedom, the future for our children. On our own, these are too much for us to handle. But if God can speak a universe and it rises up in obedience, maybe he can be trusted with the things that are too much for me in 2020.

Here's the question. How does knowing the God of Genesis 1 change how anxious we are about the things of the world? Speaking of disasters, one of the not good things around us is climate change.

This chapter says it is right and good for us to be stewards, to bear God's image by ruling his creation in a good way, the way he would.

But this chapter also prevents us from taking things too far. It seems to me that lots of people have begun to worship a mother earth rather than a father God.

[18:20] And I'm not exactly sure what's going on with the environment. I don't think anyone is really, but Genesis 1 says we can do so much more than protest our politicians. This passage says that Christians can pray to the God who said, let it be.

And it was so. That's the environment. What about other people? This passage affects how we treat other people. Genesis 1 says all people are made in God's image.

That means family and friends. They carry great dignity just by being human. But that means so do old people and young people.

So do sick people. So do people who are dying or people still in the womb. All people have great dignity and privilege. All people bear God's image just because they're human.

This also is quite challenging because it means that people who vote differently to us. Or people who go to different churches or belong to different faiths. People who are members of the rainbow community.

[19:24] And most of all, that one person in your family who is just the worst. All people are made in God's image. So here's another challenge. How does knowing that everyone is made in God's image challenge the way you treat that really horrible person?

It's a good challenge. Genesis 1 says that even the people we struggle with are precious to God. He put his image on them just because they're human.

And what I want to do, just to finish, is something a little bit funky. But it's summer and we can do these sorts of things. So what I want you to do is do some work yourselves. We're going to move to the last section, which is Christianity.

What I want you to do is, with the people around you and next to you, what areas of Christianity make more sense because of Genesis 1? In other words, what aspects of the Christian doctrine are underpinned by Genesis 1?

Is that clear? Over to you for a few minutes. Introduce yourselves to the people around you. Over to you. Great. Can I interrupt you there?

[20:34] Something to chat to the people with, as you have coffee and tea, a little bit later. Many of the Christian things we believe. Christianity, you could say, came thousands of years after Genesis 1.

But many things in Christianity are underpinned by Genesis 1. I wonder what some of the things you said were. What about this? If God created us once, he can do it again.

Christians believe in life after death. Just as God creates life where there was none, he can do that again in us, as he already did the first time. This chapter shows us the order of the universe.

There's God on top and then us and then all of creation underneath. That order is very good. What do you think the consequences will be if we flip a good order on its head?

What do you think the consequences for the universe would be? Not good. This chapter makes sense of sin and why our world is full of not good things.

[21:36] We'll see more of that in Genesis 3 coming up. But of all the Christian things this makes sense of, this one makes the most sense of Jesus himself. The identity of Jesus.

You see, all morning we've been talking about getting to know God. But even if we went, sorry, but we can't go on a date with God and see him across a restaurant table. Genesis says that he's outside of our space and time.

So we can't find him by flying into space in a rocket. Our census form says he's on the other side of the equation. But Colossians says the sun is the image of the invisible God.

That means to see, if we want to see the God of Genesis 1, we only need to look at Jesus. In fact, much of Jesus' life only makes sense because of Genesis 1.

So Easter, just as God powerfully creates life when there was none, so too when he raises Jesus from the dead. Think about all of Jesus' miracles.

[22:40] They're just mini versions of what happens here in the first chapter of the Bible. Those miracles, they show that Jesus speaks for God, that God is working through him.

His creative power authenticates the words that he says. Colossians 1 says, So even though this chapter doesn't mention Jesus by name, he's everywhere in Genesis 1.

32 times, in fact, Jesus is the one doing all of the doings. And so that is a brief introduction to Genesis 1. An introduction to God.

Creator, beginning, powerful, ordered and good. It's a big first date. And we'll see what happens next week as well.

For now, I'm going to pray. Father God, we praise you, the creator of heaven and earth.

[23:46] Every other God is something made of stone and wood. But you are the only wise, the creator. Father, we thank you that you made us in your image.

That you put great dignity and esteem in us just by being human. And Father, please, would Genesis 1 change the way we live in your world?

Would it affect how we think of idols and other people? Would it change the way we look at Jesus? Who is your image?

Your firstborn? And we pray these things in his name. Amen.