

In The Beginning, God

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[0 : 00] Well, as I mentioned earlier, we are beginning a new series this morning in the book of Genesis, and I joked last week with you that we would probably spend something like the next 10 years or so together in Genesis.

That's not really true, but we will take a good bit of time to go through this together, especially so in the first three chapters of Genesis. And we really want to take our time here because these first chapters of Genesis are foundational for our faith.

Foundational. They're significant for us. And so if you would, please take your Bibles and open them up to the book of Genesis this morning. If you don't have a Bible, if you didn't bring one with you, feel free to use one of those in the seat backs in front of you.

If you don't have a Bible at all of your own, feel free to take that one home with you as our gift to you. It should be easy to find our passage this morning. It's the first book of the Bible, the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, and first verse of the first chapter of the first book of the Bible. Genesis 1 verse 1. And so when you found it, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's Word this morning. Genesis 1 verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

[1 : 23] Let's pray again. Lord, Father, these words are familiar to us, but they, again, are so important for us. And so we pray, Lord, would you speak to us today and reveal yourself to us through the preaching of your Word.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Every good builder knows that in order to build a sturdy house, you have to first lay a firm foundation.

And if you don't, sooner or later, you're pretty much guaranteed to run into some significant issues. And sometimes you may not even know that the foundation is off. And maybe you move into a new house and you think everything is just fine.

But then eventually you start noticing the walls are starting to crack. The floors are starting to buckle. The doorways are a little bit tilted.

And you realize these are symptoms of a bigger issue. The foundation needs to be corrected. This morning we begin a new series in the book of Genesis.

[2 : 25] And you may be wondering, why in the world are we going to spend so much time together in the book of Genesis? Or even you may be wondering, well, how in the world could this old book, the very first book of the Old Testament, how could that have any relevance to my life at all?

Well, one reason is Genesis is the foundation for the rest of the Bible. It's the very first book. If you want to read and understand your Bible better, one way to do so is to really study and read and understand the book of Genesis.

Everything from the prophets to the gospels all the way to the book of Revelation, it's all built up on this foundation. Ken Matthews, one commentator, he says, if we possessed a Bible without Genesis, we would have a house of cards without foundation or mortar.

It's also true theologically. As you think about all the major church doctrines, theological doctrines, one of my former professors, John Currid, he said almost every important church doctrine is found in seed form here in the book of Genesis.

It's here in this book that we're introduced to God and man, good and evil, sin and temptation, law and grace, justice and mercy. There's themes of kingdom and covenant, blessing and cursing.

[3 : 53] The foundation for all of it is laid right here. And I would argue, again, that most of these themes are established for us even in the first chapters of the book of Genesis.

It's not only that. It's not the only reason we want to turn to this book. As you look around us at our culture, hopefully you see what I see. There are cracks in the walls.

The floors are buckling. The doorways are tilted. And when we look outside of these walls and we see issues around us, we ought to realize that these are ultimately, they are foundation issues. And so really, I'm hard pressed to find a more relevant book than this old book of Genesis. We see issues of human sexuality and identity. The value and the dignity of human life.

We see the purpose and the meaning of life and the meaning of work and labor. We see the institution of marriage. All of it is right here, even in the first pages of the book of Genesis.

[4 : 56] I truly believe that rightly understood, the truths that we'll see here in this book are the foundation of a flourishing society. But not only for a flourishing society, but also for a flourishing church.

I truly believe that many churches and many Christians would do well to take a slow walk through the Garden of Eden. To reinforce our foundation.

Make certain that as things have gone by, as time has passed, that nothing has shifted or eroded as time has gone on. So here again, it's my prayer as we begin this book together.

That God would lay for us a firm foundation for our faith. Amen? Would you pray again with me briefly one more time as we begin?

And ask God to do that for us. Lord, we want to see and understand all things from a God-centered perspective. And so we pray and we ask again, Lord, would you lay for us a firm foundation for our faith?

[6 : 00] We commit this series, this sermon, this time together in Genesis to you. And we ask God that you would show us Christ. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. I see three foundational truths here about God in the first verse of Genesis. Three foundational truths about God.

Number one, first we see that God is the focus of all things. God is the focus of all things.

In the beginning, God, Derek Kinner says, It is no accident that God is the subject of the first sentence of the Bible. In fact, this word, God, dominates the whole chapter and catches the eye at every point of the page.

It's used some 35 times in just as many verses of the story. So we won't spend too much time here, but I do just want to make this point. It's obvious, I think, but it needs to be said, the Bible begins with God.

[7 : 09] As we start off this journey in Genesis, you really can't miss this, can you? God is the main character of this book. If you were to pick up the Bible with no knowledge of Christianity, no knowledge of religion whatsoever, no knowledge of anything else that this book contained, if you were to pick it up and start reading at the very beginning, the very first person you would be introduced to is God.

These first four words of the Bible, they teach us an incredibly important truth, and it's this. The world that we live in, it does not revolve around us.

It revolves around God. It's not about us. We're not the king of the universe. God is the king of the universe. We're not the point of this story.

God is the point of this story. God doesn't exist for us. We exist, along with everything else in the universe, for God.

We have to understand this, and it's easy, again, it's obvious to see it, but it's impossible, apart from his grace, for us to really get this right. Because all of us, myself included, all of us in our sin nature, you know what we want to do?

[8 : 24] We want to make everything about us. And we want to be at the center. We want to be the focus. We want to be made much of.

We want our desires to be affirmed. We want our ambitions to be celebrated. And our sin nature really doesn't like it any other way. But here again, in the beginning, we're reminded God is the focus.

And it's his desires that are ultimate, not ours. And it's his words and it's his glory that are the center of the universe.

And church, there's so many ways to apply this truth. There's application for our worship services here as we gather together for worship. When we gather together, again, in our sinful flesh, we might want to hear about us.

We might want to sing about us. We might want to worship however we want to worship. We might want to come in and do whatever makes us feel good.

[9 : 29] But we ought to be reminded again, our time gathering here for worship isn't ultimately about us. And our wants and our preferences and our tastes.

It is about God. And we ought to come in here expecting and desiring and wanting to meet with him. There's application for our times of private devotion and Bible reading.

When we come to this book, the Bible, we ought to acknowledge it's for us. It's for our good, but it is not about us. We are not the focus of the Bible.

God is the focus of the Bible. When we have our times of private devotion, the point of those times is to meet with God. Even as we look ahead to the great work of redemption at the cross of Christ, to the gospel.

Again, although it is for you, it is not about you and how great you are. It is about God and how great God is.

[10 : 35] We apply it to our own life. And this is a big realization. Every part of your life, your career, your marriage, your families, your ambitions.

Again, these are wonderful gifts to us, but they are not ultimately about us. We exist to magnify the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And you remember from last week, what we saw last week from Matthew chapter 28. The first task of every believer is to magnify the glory of God. How? It is by enjoying Him.

By delighting in Him. So we have to ask here as we begin this book together. Is He the very center of your life and your joy?

Or do you fight Him for control of that position in your life? You hear that question? Is God and His glory at the very center of your life and your joy and your ambition?

[11 : 40] Or do you wrestle with Him and try to replace Him as the center of your life? Listen to this from Jonathan Edwards. He says, This is the difference between the joy of the hypocrite and the joy of the true saint.

The hypocrite rejoices in himself. Self is the first foundation of his joy. The true saint rejoices in God.

True saints have their minds in the first place inexpressibly pleased and delighted with the sweet ideas and the glorious and amiable nature of the things of God.

And this is the spring of all their delights and the cream of all their pleasures. But the dependence of the affections of the hypocrites is in contrary order. They first rejoice that they are made so much of by God.

And then on that ground, He seems lovely to them. You see the difference? Church, God is the focus of this story. The Bible begins with God.

[12 : 46] Fully satisfied. Fully content. Fully God before anything else in the universe is made. And in this first introduction to the person of God, we're told some very important truths about who He is.

And so second, second foundational truth here, we see that God is the sovereign, eternal creator of all things.

Second foundational truth. And we'll spend most of our time here on this point. God is the sovereign, eternal creator of all things.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. You know, it is interesting for me to think about the context of the Israelites as they would have first heard and received this text.

I mean, put yourself in their shoes just for a moment. You might remember Moses wrote Genesis. And of course, they knew these truths through oral tradition, but they would have received this text and read it for the first time as they were making their way into the promised land.

[14 : 02] And you remember what that time was like for them. We just got done studying Joshua in the Sunday school hour. You remember what that time was like for them as they journeyed into the promised land. They are being called out of the world.

They're being called to be a distinct people of God. They're being marked off as His distinct people. But you remember also how they're constantly tempted to look just like all the nations around them. They're tempted to bow down and to worship false gods. They're surrounded by enemies at every turn. And so they're tempted even to fear the strength of the gods of the nations, to fear the power of these false gods.

And you think about what these false gods were like. All of these ancient Near Eastern cultures around them, they associated different parts of creation with the gods.

And so they worshiped the God of the sun and the God of the moon and the God of the stars and the God of the water. As they looked around them, they spiritualized these aspects of creation and they worshiped them as something divine and something powerful.

[15:13] Think about how powerful and reassuring it would be for them to hear, No, no, no, no, no, no. In the beginning, before any of these things were made, God was there.

Your God, the God who is creating you as His people, is the same God who created the heavens and the earth. These gods of the nations are no gods at all.

These gods of the nations, they're the creation of the one true God. Everything that these other cultures worship, the one true God has made. He created it.

He rules over these little G gods. They serve Him. They exist by His will. Why would you turn and serve any of these other things, other created things, when God, the creator of it all, calls you to serve Him?

Why would you fear any of these other parts of creation, when God is the sovereign king of all creation? None of these things can harm you apart from His will.

[16:19] This very first line, along with everything that follows, is a reorientation for the Israelites to give them a God-centered worldview.

As Israel journeyed into the promised land and prepared to set up civilization as God's people and God's kingdom, they needed to be reminded, God is the sovereign king of the universe.

And you know what, church? Here, a few thousand years later, the church needs to be reminded of that very same message.

You realize God has called us out of this world to be His distinct people. God has recreated us, the church, as His own people.

We are marching forwards towards the true promised land. And all around us are false gods. All around you are created things that tempt you and that threaten you.

[17:30] And we too need to be reminded that there is one God who stands before all and He is the sovereign king of the universe. Not only this, but He's the eternal king of the universe.

Have you ever thought about the fact that God is eternal? I hope you had your coffee this morning. This is a lot. Stephen Sharnock, he sums it up like this.

He says that the fact that God is eternal, it means that He has no beginning, He has no end, and He has no temporal secession of time.

God has no beginning, and no end, and has no temporal secession. My family went to the mountains for Thanksgiving. We were talking about it this morning. And as we were driving up and going up these long and winding roads up into the mountains, the boys were looking out the windows and just seeing these beautiful mountains in western North Carolina.

It's dangerous how beautiful it is, especially for the driver, right? Because you shouldn't look out the windows. But as we went up these mountains, I was reminded of Psalm 90, verse 2.

[18:48] And it became our theme verse for the week. Psalm 90, verse 2. Before the mountains were brought forth, wherever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

God. In the beginning, God. God is there. Before anything else was there.

Before these mountains, He was there totally complete, totally satisfied, totally glorious, totally content in and of Himself. He was there.

And one billion years from now, guess what? God is there. From everlasting to everlasting, He is God.

He has no beginning. He has no end. But listen, even if we could begin to understand that and wrap our minds around that, it's the third description that throws me for a loop. I don't know about you. In Him, there is no secession of time.

[19:54] You know, we can't, we can't even begin to conceive of this because we exist in time, don't we? And we measure everything, by time. We have a beginning. We age, and we progress.

We change. We have a past. We have a future. We measure years by months, and months by weeks, and weeks by days, and days by hours, and minutes and seconds, and we can't escape time.

We live within it. But for God, there is no past. There is no future. For God, there is only eternally right now.

God isn't different today than He was a hundred million years ago. God won't be different a hundred million years in the future as He is right this minute.

God was just as present with me there in the mountains as He was the moment they were created, as He will be when they dissolve. That's what it means to be eternal.

[21 : 01] You know, church, we, sometimes I fear that we take these truths for granted. That we know them intellectually. We know in the beginning God.

The right response to a God like this is that we ought to marvel at a God like this. The God of the Bible is beyond our comprehension.

I wonder, are you okay with that? Right away, in the very first book of the Bible, we are faced with truths that we cannot begin to comprehend.

The truth is, I can describe that to you. God's eternal, but I can't fully wrap my mind around it. I can't fully explain it. Right here, at the beginning of the Bible, we are introduced to a God who is greater than us.

Who is beyond us. To a God who is indescribable and incomprehensible and incomparable. And we aren't dealing here with a God that fits within the limits of our natural understanding.

[22 : 07] And sometimes you and I, we get frustrated when we come upon something in the Bible that we can't understand. And can I just suggest that maybe that ought to lead us to awe and wonder rather than frustration.

God is beyond our comprehension. We can jump into that ocean of His glory and swim down as deep as we possibly can and guess what?

You will never reach the bottom. In fact, this is what we have to look forward to in eternity in Christ. This is what we have been brought into by the grace of God through faith in Christ. If you are a Christian, listen to what you have to look forward to. This is what it means to be a Christian, by the way.

To be a Christian is to be brought into relationship with this sovereign, eternal God by faith in Christ. And so now, for the rest of eternity, guess what you get to do?

[23 : 10] You get to plunge the depths of the glory of God and never exhaust His goodness. That's what it means to enjoy everlasting life.

I used to think everlasting life sounded a little bit boring. Right? What in the world do you do with all that time? I had too small a view of God.

It will take all of eternity for an eternal God to reveal Himself to you. New glories will unfold every moment, every hour of the day.

New reasons to rejoice for the rest of eternity. New reasons to worship for the rest of eternity. New reasons to be satisfied in God for the rest of eternity.

There is no end to His goodness. So there's no end to our pleasure in Him for the rest of eternity. An eternal God is reason to rejoice and to marvel, church.

[24 : 15] One of my favorite passages of Scripture is Ephesians chapter 2. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2, you were dead in sin. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Why? What's the point?

What's the point? What's the end of it? What's this headed towards? Verse 7. So that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. How long do you think that'll take, church? It'll take all of eternity for us to drink in the fullness of the immeasurable riches of God's grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

If you enjoy God right now, friend, you don't know the half of it. He's beyond our comprehension and yet, and yet, here in the first verse of Scripture we see that God, the sovereign, eternal King of the universe, He has acted and He has spoken and He has created all things.

[25 : 55] So we should ask, why? Why did this sovereign, eternal God create all things? And we see the answer throughout the rest of Scripture and it's this.

He has created all things in order that this infinite, eternal, glorious God might be known and His glory magnified in all the earth.

So third, third foundational truth here about God is this, that all things exist for His glory. This God is worthy of our worship.

That's the point of creation. That's the end of all of this. And again, we return right back to where we started, don't we? He created it all that He might be the focus of it all.

God created all things that in all things He might display His glory. God created all things that in all things He might magnify the glory of God generally in creation, but specifically and especially in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[27 : 08] A creation is for us, is for our good, we benefit from it, we enjoy it, but it is not about us, it's about Him and His glory.

The point of creation is the magnification of the glory of God for from Him and to Him and through Him are all things to Him be the glory forever.

He created all things that in all things He might put His glorious power on display. Psalm chapter 19, you know this text.

The heavens declare the glory of God. The sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge.

There's no speech nor are there words whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes throughout all the earth and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tent for the sun which comes out like a bridegroom leaving its chamber and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

[28 : 17] Its rising is from the end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them and there is nothing hidden from its heat. Creation is proclaiming a message which it will never cease to amaze me how anyone could go outside and look up at the sky and think all of this is just an accident and some product of randomness.

How in the world could anyone go to the beach to the ocean go walk in the woods put their feet in the grass go to the mountains and think that all of this just showed up on its own just random explosions of matter that apparently appeared on their own without any real explanation I mean it takes a great leap of faith to believe something like that.

Creation itself is speaking a message it's telling you that it has been made by a good and glorious eternal sovereign God.

Romans chapter 1 Paul says God's 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. He made all things to demonstrate and to communicate his eternal power and his divine nature that they might be perceived and in being perceived that they might be rejoiced in that he might be exalted and glorified.

[29 : 56] But not only this there's a greater purpose here for creation. Ultimately God made all things in order that he might redeem all things through his son Jesus Christ.

creation in and of itself it can show forth his power and his divine nature and his creativity and his intelligence but the gospel of Jesus Christ shows us his grace and his love towards sinners and his heart of mercy as well as his wrath and his holiness and his justice.

As we begin here in the book of Genesis we have to keep this in view that all of this everything else that we'll see in this book together ultimately all of it is about the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1 16 and 17 says by him that is Jesus by him all things were created in heaven and on earth visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or rulers and authorities all things were created through him and for him through Jesus and for Jesus and he is before all things and in him all things hold together where is Jesus in the first pages of the Bible he is there creating all things he is holding it all together he's ruling over creation as king of the universe John chapter 1 says in the beginning was the word the word was with God and the word was God he was in the beginning with God all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made and this eternal word he goes on to tell us this word became flesh and dwelt among us and to all who receive him who believe in his name he gives the right to become children of God

Jesus is the focus of all things Jesus is the sovereign eternal creator of it all and Jesus is worthy of our worship all things exist for the glory of king Jesus Jesus is the lamb who was slain from before the foundation of the world for the salvation of a people who are chosen in him before the foundation of the world that we might inherit a kingdom prepared for us from before the foundation of the world and enjoy the glory of God who existed before the foundation of the world for the rest of eternity this is why he created the world and this is why he created you is this how you see the world around you is this how you understand the universe and all that exists within it do you understand all things in the universe including you and your life including you and your plans

including you and your desires including you and your ambitions do you understand that all of it all of it exists for him and his glory friend if the walls are cracking the floors are buckling the doors are tilting and the house is leaning let's make certain the foundation is solid it may be that you have built your life on another foundation whatever that may be if you have done so it's my invitation my call to you this morning would you repent and put your faith in Christ would you boot yourself out of the focus and center of your life and instead turn to

[34 : 18] Christ and make God and his glory the foundation and the center of your life and church it may just be that time has gone on and things have settled a little bit and we need some reinforcement this morning whatever that may be church it's my desire that each one of us would live with God and his glory in Christ right at the center of our lives let's pray father worthy are you oh lord and god to receive glory and honor and praise and power and worthy are you for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created father you are worthy of our lives we exist for you not for ourselves we're made to serve and to honor you and and there's no greater joy and delight than to know you father now and to the rest of eternity and so we pray god would you be central to our lives we ask this in jesus name amen