

Gen 1:1–3 // The Beginning //

The Whole Story #2

Last week at TSC we began a new series going through the entire Bible.

The Bible intimidates a lot of people—there’s so much that seems hard to understand or apply.

I heard a true story this week that completely captures that...

Rupert Leary, one of our college pastors, told me that a guy serving in their campus ministry befriended a Chinese grad student, whom we’ll call ‘Lee,’ who showed lots of interest in faith.

- He **literally had never heard** of Jesus. He dove in, and,
- **to make a long story short**, came to faith in Christ right before Christmas break last year.

Well, just before this student left to go home to China for Christmas break this college pastor gave him his **first English/Mandarin Bible** to read on his own while back home.

At **New Year’s he got a text from the Chinese student** regarding Genesis 17, where God tells Abraham, "The sign of the covenant between me and you is that you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin."

“Lee” believed this to be a step of obedience to the faith. He read it that morning; walked into a clinic in China that afternoon, and then sent this college pastor a text that night to tell him the deed was done.

Works Consulted:

Tim Keller, “Before the Beginning”

Tim Keller, “The Song of Creation”

Tim Keller, “The Garden of God”

Tim Keller, “The First Word”

John Mark Comer, “A Biblical Theology of Work”

John Mark Comer, “Identity and Vocation”

Sally Lloyd-Jones, “The Beginning: A Perfect Home” (From *The Jesus Storybook Bible*)

So, 2 thoughts there: 1. You have to **admire this kid’s commitment** to follow Jesus. In fact, that might make for a good rallying call on campus: “How far are you willing to follow Jesus? Will you follow him through the gauntlet? Lee did.”

2. It is **possible to misunderstand** part of the Bible!

Hopefully any **misinterpretations you have made aren’t that painful**, but **needless to say it can be intimidating** to just pick up the Bible and say, “I’m going to just read and obey it.”

- (BTW, if you **don’t know what circumcision is?** Your campus pastor would be absolutely overjoyed to stick around after service and explain it to you.)

Furthermore, while many of you have learned **little bits and shards of** Bible knowledge over the years, you have **never brought it all together** in one, unified whole.

We’re going to try to change that this year. We’re going to take a **whole year**—about 50 messages—and go through the whole Bible.

We’re calling this series “The Whole Story,” because that’s what we’re going to see—in all the stories, commands, genealogies, and characters, there’s really just ONE story being told, and it’s a story not about you and your life; it’s a story about Jesus.

I really want you to take this seriously, and to that end, we want to give you a few resources:

- JSB: adult version?

- Reading plans
- Get in a small group

OPEN YOUR BIBLES TO GENESIS 1:1

WELL, LAST WEEK WE ESTABLISHED... *The Bible is not a book about you.* This is often people's **first and biggest mistake** about the Bible, they approach it like a manual on how to fix their lives, like a **Christian version of Aesop's fables** or something: *Practical advice for living.*

But the Bible is **not a book about you**; it's about Jesus. *Every character, every genealogy, every command, points to him; or, as the JSB states: every story whispers his name.*

And the irony is that when you see that, that will fix your life. Or we might say it like this: **The point of the Bible is not to tell you how to fix your life**, but to fix your eyes on Jesus.

- And when that happens, his power will begin to fix your life.

We see this central message introduced in the very 1st verses:

Gen 1:1, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The 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.³ And God said, Let there be light! And there was light..."

Tim Keller says that in these first 3 verses, before creation even begins, we see 3 things, each w/ profound implications for how we live.¹

1. Before the Creation, there was God...

- "In the beginning, God." You say, "Well, duh." **You may not realize** how unique this is in creation accounts.
- **In most other creation accounts**, the universe comes from something—there are usually multiple gods and our universe is the result of some cosmic battle.
 - According to one myth, the **human race arises from the blood of slain god**; in another they are created from the remains of a dead sea monster.
 - In these accounts, **humans are typically an accident** or an afterthought, the **result of bigger cosmic forces** that have nothing to do with them.
- **Yet, in Genesis, everything starts with one God** who creates all by himself out of nothing. Creation EX NIHILO
 - **Isa 44:24 says that** he stretched out the heavens all by himself and no one was with him. **He took counsel with no one; not the angels, NO ONE.**
- **It all comes from him, and it all exists for him.** And then, something else—Genesis says that God made man and woman *in his image*.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Here's what that means: If all things come from God and he made us in his image, there are two things we will only ever be able to find in him.

The first is the **MEASURE** of life:

- **What is good**; what is bad; what life's purpose is.

¹ Tim Keller, Before the Beginning, Gen 1 1-3.

- **Atheists, you see, have a problem.** And many of them know it, because it's been pointed out by many of the best atheist philosophers—guys like Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean Paul Sartre.
 - (Nietzsche and Sartre are **my favorite atheists**, btw, because they force their atheism to its logical conclusion.)
- **Sartre said that the atheists' problem starts with good news.** Once you dispense with God, he says, the good news is you can do what you want, guilt free, no dread of retribution. If you get away with it on earth, you get away with it forever. The **bad news is when you dispense with God you lose all intellectual bases** for declaring anything to be inherently right or wrong.
 - **You see, in order to say something is "right" or "wrong," you have to have a standard you are comparing it to** (to say something is against the design you have to know what the design is) **and if the universe is simply randomly colliding materials, there can't be any design or purpose, and thus no right or wrong.**
 - You might argue, practically speaking, that **certain things seem are more "useful"** for the human race, based on **your vantage point**, but **that's different** than saying something is "wrong" or "evil."
 - **You may *feel* that genocide is wrong**, for example, but why?
 - Just because you think it is more useful to the human race for there not to be genocide?
 - The **Nazis had a different** opinion.
 - You **might argue they are wrong** in that calculation, but that's **different than saying** that THE STRONG targeting the weak for extinction is **evil**.
 - And **what is special about the human race anyway?** Why should it survive? Why not let survival of the fittest do its work on us?
- **You say, "Well, whatever the majority of people think is right should be the law."** (wiktiality—the idea that the majority has to be right)
 - Really? **Where does that leave the slave living in the American South** in the 1840's when the majority assumes that their oppression is what is most useful for society?
 - Or the Jew in **1930's Europe**? If the Nazis had won and convinced everyone of the superiority of the Arian race, would that have made Jewish oppression right?
- **For the atheist, there is no such thing as true beauty**—again, **just things** we have become programmed to believe are useful.
 - Let me **quote now from my LEAST favorite atheist** (soundbite atheist), Richard Dawkins: "When you look at certain scenery, you think it is so beautiful because your ancestors believed that there was food out there, and that particular neurological feature that helped them survive has now come down to you; and that's the reason you see it as 'beautiful.'"
 - Honestly, just ask yourself: do you buy that? If you do—I mean really do—then I've got a lot of respect for you, because that just doesn't make sense with life. That feeling you have looking out at a sunset or a starry night is just about finding food? "It reminds me of Twinkies!" I don't even know how that works. No, something in us says that's absurd.
- **Or that love you feel for your kids or for your spouse**—do you **honestly believe it is only what Richard Dawkins** says—just a conditioned response that our genes have programmed us to make propagate our DNA faster than our neighbors can propagate theirs?
 - **Try putting that on a Hallmark card: "My genes have determined** you are useful for the propagation of my DNA. Let's make out."
 - Doesn't have **quite the romantic zing** to it, does it?

For the atheist, things cannot be beautiful in themselves; they can only be useful. But **Christians believe that things are good and beautiful** because they reflect the image of the creator.

- The **sunset is beautiful because it displays** for us a beautiful God and it makes us yearn for him.
 - **So when you see that beauty, your heart should cry out, "God you are amazing!** How majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens!"
- **Christians believe in justice** because God is just and true; they believe in love because God, our designer is love.

So because we come from God, he provides the MEASURE for our lives; and because we from God, we find **our MEANING in him**.

- The **human heart is designed** so that it only works when God is at the center...
 - The writer of **Ecclesiastes** calls that “eternity in our hearts.”
 - **Pascal: God-sized hole.** (Parents’ love; praise of others; success and money; family; even alcohol or drugs)
 - **When God is not in the right place...** you’ll feel like happiness is always around corner, but not quite there yet.
- Until you find him, **life is like a tool** that you don’t quite know what it’s for.
 - **When Veronica and I moved in to our house...** Key to a flew. Kind of disappointing: treasure chest/secret passage /launch my own National Treasure adventure; I get to be Nicolas Cage.)
- **C. S. Lewis says this is one of the most powerful arguments** for the existence God.
 - **“A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this**

world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, ... well, earthly pleasures were never **meant** to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.”²

- Because you are made in the image of God, you’ll never find your place in life until you have found yourself in God.
- Everything is **from him**—it find its measure and meaning in him.
- Everything is **for him**—it all exists for his glory.
 - *You exist for his glory, and you will one day be measured by how much you live up to that.*
 - *You will be fulfilled to the extent you embrace that*

2. Before the Creation, there was love...

- Let me show you: In vs. 26, God said, **“Let us make man in our image...”** Now, who is **us**, exactly? *Isa 44 wrong/*
- If you look closely, you’ll see all 3 Persons of the Trinity in the first 3 verses of Genesis. **(Gen 1:1, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.³ And God said...)** (Everything created through a Word, which is Jesus).
- **You say, “Well, I don’t get you saying, ‘God said’ = presence of Jesus.”** Look at how the Apostle John opens his Gospel:
 - **John 1:1–3, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. The word was Jesus.**
- **So from the very first chapter, you see evidence that God is a Trinity**—3 persons existing in one being.
 - And I know it is **hard to understand**: mind implode and explode

² *Mere Christianity*, Book III, chap 10, “Hope.”

- **Best we can do** is come up with analogies
- **But here's what that means—in his very essence**, from the very beginning, God has **existed in relationship**.
- He **didn't create us because he was lonely**. He created us an overflow of his **love**.
 - The Apostle Paul says that the **best analogy** we have **for the Trinity is marriage**.
 - **Two beings, one essence:**
 - Out of that comes **a child**.
 - In a **good marriage**, you don't have kids because you are lonely. You are supposed to bring them into a loving union.
 - **That's what we see in Genesis. God's love spills out** onto the canvas of the universe and he invites us into his love.³
- **One of the phrases you see repeated** throughout Gen 1 you see this phrase, "And God saw; and God saw..." God, like a good father, has his NANNY CAM. Always looks on what he has made. He isn't distant from it; he always sees it and never forgets it.
 - **And would you stop for just a minute** and think about that? Whatever you are going through, *God sees*.
 - Are you in pain? He sees.
 - Been betrayed?
 - Financial difficulties? He sees and you have not been forgotten.

Genesis 1 is an overflow of the love of God...

- You can **even see that in the literary structure** of the chapter. **Genesis 1 is not just** a straightforward recounting of the facts. It is very artistic: there's all this repetition and pattern...

³ (Other religions don't teach this. Islam, for example, teaches that God is this one, static being, so the first time he felt love was when he created something, because before that there was nothing to love. In

- Each creation moment is told with a pattern... "And God saw it, and it was good... the evening and morning were the 'first day.'"
- It's **something like a poem or song**; maybe the best equivalent we have is "spoken word."
 - Repeating "and it was good" at the end of each phrase is like saying, "**Come wid it. Come, come wid it**" in Hebrew.
- In *The Chronicles of Narnia* C. S. Lewis presents creation happening as Aslan sings this song of joy and intimacy in the Trinity and creation comes out of that.
- **Here's what that means: Because we are created in the image of a God who exists in love**, our lives will never be complete until we are living in love and community with others.
 - **The path of godliness always leads toward community—**toward relationships and small groups.
 - MEN, let me talk to you: as we get older, we **tend to get more and more isolated**.
 - It starts with **an absence of friends**; eventually we pull inward from our wives.
 - That leads to destruction and unhealthiness.
 - **Prov 18:24**, "An isolated man seeks his own desire..."
 - David Powlison: "Things that grow in a secret garden always grow mutant."
 - **God created our hearts and lives to work only when we are in deep community with others.**
 - Ask yourself: How much different would your life be if you were in community? What mistakes in your past might you have avoided?

Islam, God is power first; secondarily love.) **But the Bible teaches that God is love in his essence.** And creation was an expression of that love...

- **Or think about the family** you grew up in: what would your ***dad's* life** have been like if he had close friends? Would that have prevented your **parent's divorce**? Would it have made your **home look different**?
- *Don't you inherently know that community leads to life? Let me tell you why you know that: because it's an inherent part of God's life, too, and you are made in his image.*⁴
 - I know that small groups can be messy, but they make for a healthy life.

Before I go to number 3, let me stop here to answer the 2 biggest questions I get on Genesis 1 and 2, because it seems to fit here.

- First, some people point out that there appear to be **2 different creation accounts**: One in Gen 1 and a 2nd one in Gen 2, and some of the order is different.
- Well, as I pointed out *Gen 1 is an artistic rendering; Gen 2 is like the essay*. Genesis 1 is not meant primarily to be a historical documentation of the facts; it's meant to be a poetic celebration of the WHO of creation. That doesn't mean it is un-factual, just that its purpose is celebration, not documentation.
- This is actually a **common pattern** in Scripture.
 - **For example, in Exodus 14**, we have documentation of Israel escaping Pharaoh through the Red Sea; then, Exodus 15, we have Miriam's song celebrating the event. These are not two contradictory accounts.
 - In **Judges 4** we have the narrative of the war of Deborah and Barak; in **Judges 5** we have Deborah's song.
 - It's not that **Judges 4 is** history and Judges 5 is a myth. No, there is the *documentation of Judges 4* and the *celebration of Judges 5 fitting together*.

⁴ Modified from something heard in an Andy Stanley sermon on small groups.

- The same with **Genesis 1 and Gen 2**. **Genesis 1** is the poem celebrating the Who and the why...⁵
 - You aren't supposed to **line the two up and try to compare details** (as if the author who put the two in here back to back was so dumb he didn't know what a "contradiction" was).
- **You see, you have to interpret Scripture the way it is written.**
- **Which leads to the even bigger question: Does Genesis 1 teach that God created the world in 7 literal days?** Or does each day maybe represent millions of years, and maybe God used things like evolution as part of the creation? Or maybe some mixture of the two? And what about dinosaurs?
 - A lot of Christians get really passionate and bent out of shape on this question. I put this in the "Jesus, Democrat or Republican" category.
- **Well, I don't want to disappoint you**, but I'm not going to answer those questions in detail here. Not because I am a wimp... or not just because I am wimp, but because speaking solely from the realm of Bible interpretation, I don't think you can use just the text of Genesis 1 to come to rock solid conclusion.
- **Again: whenever you interpret something in the Bible, you have to ask why** it was written before you press it for answers.
 - Genesis 1 is a artistic expression celebrating creation.
 - It's **pretty obvious that the author of Gen 1 didn't have** in mind the scientific nuances of creation vs evolution discussion when he wrote it.
 - The **FOCUS of Genesis 1 is not HOW he created**, but THAT he created
 - **The age of the earth is a question for scientists and theologians to explore together**, but I don't think you can use Genesis 1 to slam the door shut on either option.

⁵ Tim Keller, The Song of Creation, Gen 1.

- Listen, **I know godly, God-fearing scientists who think that God used the processes of evolution** to accomplish just about everything; and I know some that say God created the big things specifically and then let the processes of natural selection develop a lot of it from there.
 - (And, to note, **both positions have been held throughout Christian history**; several of the early church fathers, living in the first 500 years after Jesus, believed that Gen 1 represented a long period of time, not just a literal week). I'd encourage you to get into the questions and take a look.⁶
- My **encouragement to you is to study it out** with an open Bible and mind, and not look at others with disdain...
 - People who believe in literal 24-hour views sometimes look at those who don't and say, "Compromiser. Enemy of the faith." And that's nto always true.
 - And, on the other side, people who believe it is not a literal 24-hour day, say with disdain back, ("You primitive, knuckle-dragging Neanderthal. Your dumbness proves the existence of cavemen." But that's not true. Many of them are very well read and are wrestling with implications of science and theology.
 - The point is to have this discussion charitably and not turn into dogma a question Scripture did not intend to settle.
- **And for the 12 of you out there who are thinking, "Fine, he's not going to answer this now... I'll just email him and ask him later. I'll get the real answer then."** I have 2 things

to say to you: (1) I know who you are and I've already got filters set for you. (2) This is my real answer. And (3) My email address is hankmurphy@summitrdu.com.

- **What I think Genesis 1 takes off the table is the idea** that everything in the world was created through some blind, random forces, where nothing x nobody = everything.
 - **BTW, science** takes that off the table, also, but for sure Genesis 1 does.

3. Before the Creation, there was darkness...

Gen 1:1, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.

- *And then God said (almost in a second wave) – "Let there be... etc"*
- What is *odd* about this is that God seems to intentionally first create a dark, empty mess, and only then, in a "part 2," the Word goes to work.

This is SO significant. God does it this way to show us 2 things:

A. The word brings order out of chaos

- Through the Word God brings order to the chaos.
- Why did God do it this way? To show that in the same way, **our lives are a formless void** until God's Word comes in to bring life and peace and beauty and order.
- And **when his word departs from our lives**, our lives descend back into chaos.
 - **I've shown you this before**, but the author of the 1st 5 books of the Bible, Moses, actually shows you this in reversal in his 2nd book, **Exodus**.
 - Pharaoh rejects God's word, **and so God sends the plagues**.

⁶ A great one-stop resource is Kenneth Keathley and Mark Rooker's *40 Questions about Creation and Evolution*.

- At first, we may be tempted to see the plagues as 10 random punishments; 10 practical jokes.
- Look closer, however, and you'll see a pattern.
- God turns the Nile to blood, which destroys the natural ecosystem of the Nile, so out of the Nile came the frogs; from the frogs come the gnats, from the gnats come disease. It's as if creation is unraveling.
- Now, had God's only objective been to **show Pharaoh** that he existed and was more powerful than Pharaoh, he could have chosen some other means. He could have had Moses put him in the **Darth Vader chokehold**. Or Moses could have just walked in and said, "Alright Pharaoh... and made all of Pharaoh's soldiers tiny and then **squashed a few** of them... and then looked at Pharaoh and said, "You're next." Either of those would have gotten the job done.
- But God was **demonstrating something** in the plagues. Not only is he there with power, but he is showing **what sin and rebellion do...** They **unravel creation**.
- In Genesis 1, God brings **order out of chaos**. In the plagues of Exodus, sin causes order to descend back into chaos.
- The Word of God creates. Sin de-creates.
- The same is true in your life: sin unravels your family. Puts darkness into your self-image. Puts you in bondage to addictions.

Which leads to B. the author shows...

B. The Word will one day redeem what sin has destroyed

I showed you this already, but John opens up his story of Jesus' life by connecting him to Creation: **John 1:1-4**, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

- Jesus, THE WORD, is going to **RE-enter a dark, sin-filled, chaotic world**, and brought life and light to it again.
- **Throughout his ministry, we see Jesus undoing** the chaos and darkness left by sin.
 - He **heals diseases**; he opens blind eyes and makes the lame walk;
 - He **walks on water**, overcoming the chaos in creation
 - Wherever sin **had left a dark void**, he said LET THERE BE LIGHT!
 - He **forgives adulterers** and thieves, removes their shame and transforms. Zacchaeus the thief become the excessively generous... impure women becomes pillars of character and virtue.
 - He **raises the dead**.
- But then, at the end of Jesus' life, the **strangest thing happens. He is put into darkness and chaos.**
 - When he died, the **earth shook** and a **midnight-like darkness** fell upon the earth.
 - The **Spirit quit hovering** above him. Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me..." **God quit "seeing" him** and declaring he was good. God **turned his face away**.
- **The greatest mystery: Jesus, the architect, the Word, of beautiful creation, is put into the darkness and void of sin so we, who had rejected the word, could have light and life again.**
- **Jesus allowed himself to be de-created ON THE CROSS so that we could be recreated** IN THE RESURRECTION.
- **The Apostle John points outs** Jesus died on the 6th day, the same day that man was created. He was raised on the first day on the next week, as if he is beginning a new creation. And after Jesus resurrects from the dead, the first time he meets his disciples John says he does the strangest things, he breathes on them and says, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**" Strange... don't dismiss that as a Hebrew greeting! He is beginning the new creation in them.

He makes all things new!

Is your life destroyed by sin? Addiction? Family UNRAVELING? Self-image distorted? In darkness.

- **If you turn to God by faith in Christ**, he makes all things new!
- That happens **by the process of putting the Word** back inside of you.
- It's a **gradual process**—doesn't happen all at once. But as the Word comes into you, life and light enter you again.
- DOESN'T REMOVE PROBLEMS – BUT THE REAL PROBLEM IS NOT YOUR MARRIAGE, FINANCES, ANNOYING PEOPLE OR EVEN ADDICTIONS. PROBLEM IS YOUR DARK HEART. GOD BRINGS LIFE AND LIGHT

(CONCLUSION)

So the first 3 verses of Genesis shows you what God is up to in the world: You are made for him; you are created for relationships; and his Word is that brings life and order out of darkness and chaos.

Let me conclude by showing you what this means for what your role is in life.

- God made you in his image
 - **The primary verb** associated with God in Genesis 1 is “created” (**used 12 times**), which means if you only based your understanding of the “image of God” on Gen 1, you'd conclude being in the image of God meant being a creator
- God put you into an incomplete world:
 - The **word God uses over and over** to describe his creation is **good**. Good is good, but good is not perfect. Perfect means cannot be improved upon.
 - **I've explained it to you like** this: when you see my wife, she's perfect. Her dress; her make-up, her hair. She cannot be improved upon. When she first wakes up in the morning and gets out of bed, she's good.
 - God created the world **raw, in a “good” state**, so that we could cultivate it for his glory and others' good.
 - **He put us into a garden to cultivate it.**

- **So contractors** take the raw materials of sand and cement and use them to create buildings.
- **Artists** take the raw materials of color or music and arrange them into art.
- **Lawyers** take principles of justice and codify them into laws that benefit society.
 - **We are made in his image**
- And, as Christians, we are bearers of the Word, taking it into the world:
 - **In a world of darkness and chaos**, we speak the gospel of peace and life and light.
 - **Wherever there is brokenness** there should be Summit Church members speaking. In impoverished neighborhoods; in *racial tension*; oppressed places; wherever there is poverty or disease or the devastation of war; in every refugee community in the Triangle; In unreached people groups, we are bearers of the Word that brings light and life and re-creates what sin has destroyed.
- That leads to the **two part calling** we say that God has given to every Christian: *“Whatever you are good at, do it well to the glory of God, and so it somewhere strategic for the mission of God.”*

Here's my questions for YOU:

- Do you know God?
 - He's the reason you are created.
- Are you in community?
 - Get in a small group!
- Is his word present in your life?
 - Have you received his offer of salvation?
- And are you extending it to others?
 - Do you understand your calling and are you living it out?

Go through each of these in prayer...

