

# Genesis 1.1-25 Sermon / Faith Bible Church / 07.05.20

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- † **[1: Title]** Good morning. Let me ask you, how many books are in the Bible? Sixty-six, that's the usual answer in our tradition: thirty-nine in the Old Testament, twenty-seven in the New.
- That is a good answer. There is another good answer, can you think of it? One, right? Instead of thinking of the Bible as sixty-six books written by dozens of authors over hundreds of years, we can think of it as one coherent book, written [or inspired] by God.
  - Usually, we study small sections – an epistle, a chapter, a paragraph, even a single verse – and so long as we consider the context, we can do ok. But there is value in considering the Bible as a coherent work of literature designed by God. Today we will see one example of that value.
- † How many of you have read the Bible all the way through? How many of you think the whole Bible is easy to read and understand? Not me! Sometimes I wish God had given us a theology book, with topical chapters, so we could easily read what exactly it means to share the gospel, so I wouldn't have to try to figure out what is happening in parts of Ezekiel. But that is not what God gave us.
- Instead, in his wisdom, God revealed a book filled with prophecy and poetry, parables and proverbs, letters and covenants, theology, laws, and even songs. It's a very interesting book! Yet I would argue the overall structure of the Bible is narrative. This is God's story.
  - When you write a story, you begin it by introducing some important information, such as the setting and the hero. Today we are going to consider how God started his story and why that's important, so turn in your Bible to page one, to Genesis 1.1.
- † While you find it, let me ask, do you know what "genesis" means? **[2: define]** It means "beginning" or "source." The book of Genesis is the beginning of the Bible; it depicts the beginning of time and the universe; it reveals the source of all creation and is the source of our foundational theology.
- As we study this material over the next few weeks, we will discover that the theology revealed in the beginning of Genesis is foundational for the theology revealed in the rest of the Bible. The genesis of Genesis, the beginning of the beginning, will reveal to us truths that are so important to God that he chose to begin his story with them.
  - Today we will read **Genesis 1.1-25**, then talk about it. As we read, think about why God started his story like this. Don't think about all that you have heard about this passage, just listen and try to understand what God as the author wants to say.

**[3: 1.1-5]** Gen. 1.1-25 [NIV<sub>2011</sub>]: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

**[4: 1.6-8]** And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

**[5: 1.9-13]** And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called

“seas.” And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

**[6: 1.14-19]** And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

**[7: 1.20-23]** And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

**[8: 1.24-25]** And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

- † **[9: Questions]** Ok. Who is the first character introduced in the biblical narrative? God. Who does all the action in the beginning? God. Who is the source [genesis] of all creation in the universe? God. If the Bible is one narrative, who do you think is the protagonist or hero of the story? God. In a literary sense, God is using this introductory passage to introduce himself as the protagonist.
- † When people talk about this passage, they ask, Was this really seven days or billions of years? Why does the biblical account contradict the macro-evolutionary theory taught in our schools? Is the nature of the text strictly narrative or purely poetic or poetically narrative? How could God create light and darkness, day and night, before he created the sun?
- All those ideas are interesting and important, but none of them are why God put this first in his story. God made this the genesis of his revelation to identify the hero of the story as himself.
- † Biblical scholars also debate this passage. Some think it is straight forward narrative, with v.2 describing an early phase in creation.
- Others believe v.1 describes the original creation, but v.2 describes the situation after the rebellion of Satan and his angels, that there was desolation.
  - Yet others believe all of this, even v.1, describes God’s activity after the rebellion of Satan. These scholars do believe the Bible says God created everything, but not in Genesis 1.
  - More recently, some faithful scholars have questioned whether Genesis 1 is narrative at all. All of Genesis has poetic form, Genesis 1 especially so, so these scholars argue Genesis 1 states theological truth poetically, without being linearly historical.

- Again, those ideas are interesting and important, but none of them are why God put this first in his story. God made this the genesis of his revelation to identify the hero of the story as himself.

† **[10: God]** So let's talk about God! In v.1, the Hebrew translated as "God" [אֱלֹהִים] is plural, which in Hebrew could emphasize majesty.

- There is only one God. **Deuteronomy 4.39 NIV: Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD [Yahweh] is God [אֱלֹהִים] in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other.** There is one God, named Yahweh, God is one, but he is called [אֱלֹהִים] to emphasize his majesty.
- There is only one God, but before we go on, let me be clear, when I say "God," I mean the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see the Spirit mentioned in this passage, and we have later revelation in **Colossians 1.16 [CSB]**, speaking of Christ the Son of God, that **"...everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth..."**
- So our triune God introduces himself here, at the beginning of the narrative. Let's talk a few minutes about what he reveals about himself, then we will talk more about why.

† **[11: Eternal]** The first thing we learn about God is that God is eternal; God has always existed. Before anything else existed, God existed. Before time existed, God existed.

- Suppose we had a length of string which represented time. The very tip of the end I would be holding would represent today, and the string would run down the aisle, out the front door, across the parking lot, all the way down State Road 64, onto Anna Maria Island, and begin at the beach, because we want to represent creation as something good.
- If the string represents time, what is past that end of the string? There is no universe out there, there is no time out there, there is no out there out there. Yet God is out there, God existed always, even before time. It's beyond our comprehension, but that's ok; everything about God is beyond our finite comprehension.

† Look at the very beginning of the beginning, in v.1. The whole Bible narrative begins with, "In the beginning God... In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" [that is, everything].

- It's a daring claim: there was nothing but God; not God and others, not God and space or matter, there was only God. God created everything out of nothing. He is the only eternal one.

† **[12: transcendent]** That means God is greater than creation, for he is the creator, without limits or beginning, which leads to a second fact: God is transcendent. Unlike most gods in pagan religions, the real God is separate from, and greater than, creation: he is transcendent. He is not part of creation, he is not limited by creation, creation is not a part of him. Creation did not even emanate from God, rather God created it as an act of his will. God is transcendent.

† **[13: creator]** And here is a related fact: God is the only creator.

- In v.1, the Hebrew verb translated as "created" [בָּרָא] is used in the Old Testament only of God. Nobody else can do anything like what God did.

- Now God made you to be creative; tell me, how do you create? Some of us are artistic, making vessels of clay, pictures with chalk, castles out of sand, inspiring music. Others are good with tools, and can build machines or houses or cathedrals. Others are writers, gardeners, software programmers, cooks. God has blessed us with creative talents, which reflect his creativity.
  - But how many of us can create out of nothing? We might start with nothing but ourselves, but even then – once we have an idea – we need a blank page, a lump of clay, some supplies. Our creativity is a reflection of God's, but it is not the same. God created everything out of nothing! He is the only creator.
- † **[14: omnipotent]** What does this tell us? One thing is that God is omnipotent, meaning all powerful. God is so powerful, he could create everything in the universe, simply by speaking.
- Can you imagine that? The text reveals that God said “Let there be light”; and there was light! That God said “Let there be seed bearing plants and fruit trees”; and it was so!
  - That kind of power is frightening; but with that power, God sustains all life and the universe; so it is a good thing. Speaking specifically about the Son of God, **Colossians 1.17 CSB: He is before all things [eternal/transcendent] and by him all things hold together.** He is both creator and sustainer of the universe and of life. God is omnipotent, so powerful he could create everything out of nothing, simply by speaking.
- † **[15: sovereign]** A related thing we can discern is that God is sovereign. That means God has ultimate authority. God created everything by choice, as he willed. And he set boundaries, separating the light and the darkness, the clouds and the seas, the land from the sea.
- God made distinctive types of organisms, including sea creatures, creatures for the air, land animals, and plants. And he set a boundary that each would be its own kind and would reproduce after its own kind.
  - These details are included to emphasize that God not only created everything, he remains sovereign over everything. He has all authority over what he has created. As the one who created the universe, he is greater than the universe and he owns the universe.
  - Colossians 1.16 tells us God the Father created all things through the Son of God and for the Son of God. Our triune God is creator, sustainer, and ruler of everything... including you!
- † **[16: capable]** We also discern that God is capable to provide for his amazing and diverse creation.
- Just think of all the things God created! Saying God created “the heavens and the earth” is a poetic way of saying “everything.” Everything from comets to dandelions to ladybugs. How many different types of plants are there? How many different kinds of weeds growing by the side of the road? Kew Gardens in London says there are over 11,000 types of grass!
  - Think about your own body, how it has different parts that all are useful in themselves and miraculously coordinated to function together so you can live. Think how one part, like your hand, has sub-parts, like bone, muscle, tendon, ligament. And each of those is comprised of millions of cells. And those cells are comprised of even smaller parts, like ribosomes, cytoplasm, and a nucleus. Even these are comprised of molecules, like water, which in turn is comprised of atoms such as hydrogen and oxygen. And even the atoms are comprised of smaller units, protons, neutrons, and electrons; and we think even protons have smaller elements like quarks.

- Now all these things have to work together perfectly, perfectly! In every part of your body, there are billions of these little miraculous machines, all miraculously doing their own thing, yet miraculously in perfect coordination with each other. What does that tell you about the amazing creativity and engineering capability of God? What does that tell you about God's love and provision for his creation? God is capable to provide for his amazing and diverse creation.
- † All that God created was pure and useful for God's purposes. The structure of the universe is as amazing as the structure of our bodies. Look at v.11. Do you know scientists say without seed plants there could be no human life?
- If certain laws of physics were just slightly different, there could be no life at all. Physicist Stephen Hawking wrote [*A Brief History of Time*, 125], "The laws of science, as we know them at present, contain many fundamental numbers... The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life."
  - From nothing God created the earth; from the earth God created form; within form God created life. God created light amidst the darkness, land amidst the sea, air amidst the waters. From nothing, God created the universe perfectly tuned to support life. God is capable to provide for his amazing and diverse creation.
- † **[17: good]** That brings up one last attribute: God is good [טוֹב]. Critics and even some believers struggle with this text which says God created light three days before he created the sun and stars. It is true that eventually God would allow the sun and stars to emit light, but he generated light even before he created the sun and stars. This text does not reflect scientific ignorance nor is it necessarily a poem which ignores scientific fact. Rather it makes a point about God as the source.
- **[18: 1 John]** 1 John 1.5 NIV: **This is the message we have heard from him [Jesus] and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.**
  - **2 Corinthians 4.6 NIV: For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.**
  - God is light! He is the source of all light, physical and spiritual. If you can believe that God could create the sun, is it hard to believe that he could shine his light even without a sun?
  - **[19: Revelation]** We will observe this ourselves someday in Christ's kingdom. **Revelation 22.3-5 NET: And there will no longer be any curse, and the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship him, and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more, and they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine on them, and they will reign forever and ever.**
- † Whether Genesis 1 is only poetry or poetically narrative, it is significant that when all was formless, God first created light. Throughout the Bible there is a contrast between spiritual darkness and spiritual light, and this contrast often is represented by physical darkness and physical light. Spiritual light empowers eternal life; physical light empowers temporal life.
- **[20: good]** God created light and life: God is good [טוֹב]; because God is good, everything he created was good. Theologically, we should keep in mind that whatever God is and whatever God does, that defines what is good; God is good, no matter what we think about him. But the language of Genesis 1 communicates that what God created was good in our sense of the word

too. God is good so all he created was good, which means it was pure and it was useful for God's purposes.

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- † Ok. So we have God introducing himself as the protagonist [hero] of the story, by showing us he is the eternal, transcendent, omnipotent, sovereign, capable, and good creator and sustainer of the entire universe, including all life. Now how can this be useful to you in your day to day life?
- † Let's come back to the notion of the Bible as a coherent work of literature. If you continue reading in Genesis, you realize that all the creation we read about today was leading to something special. Do you know what that was, what comes next? The creation of people. God's purpose in creation, for his own glory, was to establish a representative people for himself. That was God's big plan.
  - **[21: equip]** As God's image bearers, these people had both identity and purpose; we'll talk more about that next week. Now as you study the literary setting of the narrative in these first few chapters of Genesis, you realize that God also equipped and empowered people to succeed.
  - How did he do that? First, God made the world to be good, suitable for his purposes. God provided plants for food, springs and rivers for water. God designed the Eden paradise where the first people were to live and work. God established the sabbath, so people would rest and remember to depend on God and be devoted to God. God provided revelation, both promises and commands. And God established marriage and the family, with a promise of fruitfulness.
- † God provided all that to equip and empower people, but the very best way God equipped and empowered them was by a relationship with himself. God himself was the best asset they had.
  - You can believe that, right? God was the eternal, transcendent, omnipotent, sovereign, capable, and good creator and sustainer of the entire universe, including all of life! If people did what God said and trusted God with all the rest, they could not fail to bring God glory.
  - As you look later in history, later in the biblical narrative, you realize God fully equipped and empowered Israel as his representative people, and now he has fully equipped and empowered the church as his representative people. Some of the equipping is different in each time period, but always the most important thing is that God offers himself in relationship with his people.
- † **[22: title]** Have any of you served as missionaries? When I preached an ordination sermon for a missionary family; I chose this passage. Seems like a strange choice at first, but think about it.
  - When that missionary family is on the other side of the world, and villagers have accused them of sorcery and plan to eat them, would it be encouraging to remember that God, to whom they pray, is all powerful? Sure it would. It might also be useful to remember that God is sovereign and good, so if his plan is to glorify himself through their martyrdom, there is no need to panic.
  - That's an extreme example. What about when they feel discouraged, because time is passing and they have not led many to Christ? I hope they will remember that their God is all-powerful, sovereign, and capable to provide and equip, so his grace can break through any obstacle, whether cultural, occultic, even those originating in the character of the missionary.
  - When they feel inadequate, unworthy, frustrated with themselves or each other, they can remember that God is good, what he created is good, and they are specially designed in his image. Knowing this theology now will strengthen them in their crisis moments.

- When they encounter other religions, they can remember that the real God is eternal, pre-dating all attempts by humans to construct religions, and the real God is transcendent, not limited in any way by the creation or the myths his creatures might invent.
  - When they are tempted to dwell on distractions or pursue something sinful or harmful, they can remember that God is sovereign, so they must obey his direction and stay focused on his work.
  - Whatever frustration, obstacle, failure, or desire they have, they can turn to their amazing God, their amazing God who can speak everything into existence, their amazing God who wants to have a relationship with them and to empower them to fulfill his purposes.
- † All that is true for you too. You might not face the threat of cannibals, but this revelation can help you to know God and relate to him. I encourage you to read this passage again this week and let the truth about God inspire a sense of awe and reverence in you.
- Let this revelation build your faith. If God is this powerful, this capable, this good, let these truths bring you comfort when you are struggling. If this revelation is leading to God having a relationship with his representative people, let that bring you hope even when your life seems hopeless. No matter what you have done, no matter where you are in life, you are not alone if you turn and cling to the God who is transcendent, capable, and good.
- † You know, Satan does not want you to have a good relationship with God, he does not want you to live as God's image. So you will hear a lot of false theology about God.
- We see this a couple of chapters later, with deception about God's honesty and goodness, and temptation to go against God's will. How different history might have been if the first people had understood God's character and what they had in relationship with him!
  - As you read the Bible, you will come across things that are confusing or go against what you thought about God; or you will read things that make you wonder about God's goodness, power to intervene, or interest in mankind. In those moments, come back to this chapter and remind yourself of the truth about who God is.
  - In life, you will hear God is not real; that all gods are the same; that God is not transcendent, rather we are all a part of God; that God is not relational, only a distant creator who does not intervene; that God is not good, not capable to help, not omnipotent; that God is not in control, does not know what people will do. These lies work on us, weaken us, so that when something bad happens, we start to doubt or drift away from God. In those moments, turn to this passage and remind yourself that God is good, he is capable and powerful enough to intervene, and he cherishes more than anything else in all creation those people who are his own.
- † Let this revelation inspire you to worship God. God is so awesome! Let us sing his praises out in the streets, let us be devoted to him, let us depend on him day to day, let us submit and obey him, let us appreciate his love and grace, but at the same time hold him in awe and reverence.
- **Psalm 111.10 NIV: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.** It leads to what Joshua said in **Joshua 24.15 NIV: ..."as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."**
  - **[23: devotion]** Let's pray...
  - devotion on web