

In The Beginning

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[0 : 00] We're going to spend a few moments today just looking at Genesis chapter one. It's the account of beginnings and I want us at the beginning of the year to spend a little time thinking about beginnings. I think it's really important today because maybe not so much for this generation of people, although there are some very young people here, but certainly for the generation, particularly maybe of our dancing girls at the back and others, it's very important that we spend time reminding ourselves of who we are and who God is and where we've come from because that is generally mocked and ridiculed today in our schools, our state education and everywhere else in the media, the whole idea of beginnings is what people are interested in, but not interested in it from a Christian point of view. And yet if we don't know about our beginnings, we just don't have a foundation for who we are and we don't recognize the significance of who we are and in whose image we're made.

So I just want to spend a few moments thinking about Genesis one. I know you know the past is well and I've preached on that before, but I think it's important for churches and ministers to preach regularly on this subject in this area. And we're reminded that this is given by God to a covenant people. It was given to God's people in the Old Testament and that was because God wanted them to know about their beginnings, not just who they were but the whole redemptive beginnings of their life as well and it all is rooted in the beginning. That's where all good stories start, in the beginning, don't they? And we all need to have a beginning. We're all going to have an end, but we all need to have a beginning and Moses was given this revelation from God to answer questions for people who were asking about their beginnings. Well where did it all start? Why are we God's people? Why have we been redeemed and what is the point of everything? It's not a scientific account so let's not wrestle with and argue about science here today and when we think about the Bible and think about beginnings with other people, it's not a scientific argument we're going to bring up with them because this is a relational account of our beginnings.

It's a spiritual story, real, but nonetheless it's not giving us a science of the beginning, it's giving us a theology of the beginning. It's telling us what happened but primarily in relation to God and that's the great thing that the Bible starts with. In the beginning, God. And that's what's really important here is that in the beginning God was there. There was not anything else there but God was there and that for us is hugely significant that before the world was there was a person, a divine person but he was there. He was always there. He wasn't created, he isn't part of the creation story and that he was self-created at that point. He always existed. Now that will blow your mind on the New Year's morning because we can't take it in but that's what's stated and that's what we believe that God is eternal. He was always there. It's not an equation at the beginning, it's not a formula, it's not a force. It's a person. It's a person that intimately we will come to recognise in whose image we're made. So there's a glorious, unique, eternal person before flooring, before walls, before trees, before rivers and mountains and matter and all the things of this creation was the spiritual being God. That God was there in the beginning. That's a great comfort.

You close your eyes tonight and pray or today or whenever. It's a great comfort to know that the one you're praying to has always been there, will always be there. It's not part of the cycle of life, birth, ageing and death. It's always there. It doesn't age, it doesn't change, it doesn't grow old, it doesn't become disinterested but it's this eternal and amazing being. And he's a God who created in the beginning, God and it tells him he created. He created everything. That's just what it means when he's created heavens and earth. It's just a way of saying he created everything that there was, he created.

[5 : 11] It's a great word that we have there, bara, that he created. It means that unlike the artist who would have raw materials, paintbrush, paint, paper or the sculptor or the architect or whoever

creates and that's a great thing. God created, we're told, without any raw material.

That's the meaning of the word he created from nothing. Astonishing. You ever thought of that before? He actually created the heavens and earth from nothing. He willed matter into being. By him, for him and for us. It seems that it was effortless, not sure if we can take that from the passage. But he created from nothing. Unbridled creativity. Absolutely glorious creative power is that God who made the heavens and the earth in his own transcendent way. He wasn't part of it. He isn't in the trees and in the mountains and part of the creation. He's separate from it. He's made that and he's made that by the word of his mouth. There's great mystery in that undoubtedly. We're not told everything. We have an account of beginnings that matter to us, what we need to know. We're not told about the creation of angels, when they were created, how they were created, in whose image they were created, we don't know anything. We're not told about the origin of evil. There are one or two hints about how evil entered into God's good universe. But we're not told of this origin. It doesn't explain a lot of creation. It simply reveals it. It's there to inspire within us faith, not formulas. It's not there to give us scientific formulas. It's there to inspire within us faith and worship, so that we worship the one who has made this and us and recognise his majesty. This is God who made, who made with purpose. When you create something, you do so, well, maybe not always. Sometimes we create without purpose. Oh, that was nice.

We didn't realise that we could do that. But usually when we create things, we think about it and we have purpose. And here is God who births the world because that's his will.

This is not an unwanted pregnancy. This is God creating this world through his purpose, his willing it to happen. And it's interesting, he talks about the heavens and the earth, but really, more than anything, this is a story about the earth. It's not so much about the heavens. We're not told very much about the heavens. It goes on then and we read it to explain the earth. He says, now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the face of the deep. So we have the picture moving immediately from this great, sovereign, amazing eternal God into something very much more imminent, much closer to us. We sit here today on planet earth. This is what God is telling us. He's telling us that he is creating.

His spirit was hovering over the waters. This is kind of interesting. And there's interesting things here. There's this talk of the spirit of God hovering, which is kind of a maternal picture. It's like the mother eagle hovering over the nest, kind of protectively over the nest. Is that kind of picture? So there's the spirit there. But if you go on to John chapter one, you've got in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. So you've got that and then the word was made flesh in Jesus. So you've kind of got a hint towards Jesus even. And you've got God the Father. And there's this kind of hints of Trinitarian closeness as he begins to create the world. And he is answering the questions of the people of God as to their primeval history. So it's a God who is glorious and who created and it's a God in these verses as well. And I'll just say a little bit about this before we finish. Is he's a God who reveals. He's a revealing God. He's telling us about himself in this passage. He's telling us about his character. And he's telling us about why he's made us and why he's made this world. His character is revealed in these brilliant verses together. It's power. The glorious power of God. It's difficult for us to comprehend that because I think we live in days when the power of God is not evident very much.

[10:48] Now God is sovereign. I don't know why that's the case. Is it because we lack the faith to believe in him? Is it because we're so immersed in this world that we have no time to think of the power of God or feel the need for it in our lives? Is it because we're so blunted to our own sin that we don't see our need for redemption in that power? But here we're reminded of the awesome power of God, particularly through his word, interestingly through his word. Isn't it interesting that God's given us his word that read something so as confession time, I shouldn't confess my sins really before you, but I am going to confess that I read something on Facebook the other day. So real confession time. And it was to do with the Bible. It was one of David Robertson's 9,555 posts on Facebook.

You probably haven't read many of them. But it was a post from a rampant atheist who was slagging the Bible and saying that people's faith is ridiculous because the Bible is untrustworthy and there's no original manuscripts and it's all full of errors and mistakes.

David was, as he does, refuting the half truths and the lies that were in that statement. And there's this, I think today we need to realise there's a great attack against the Bible and yet, attack against the word of God. It's just not trustworthy. It's not how can you believe it? God's revealed word, how

ridiculous God's word today. Now that can easily seep into our thinking. It's not trustworthy. It's not real. It's full of mistakes and so on and so forth. But we need to learn and know and understand what the Bible is and what it says about itself in being the revealed word of God and recognise that God chose to reveal His word through people and over centuries. And yet throughout that we have all the truth of Scripture unchallenged and secure in the word. But it's interesting that the word is so important in Christianity, not just the Bible, but right from the beginning and God said, and God said, and God said, now I could repeat that another seven times in the passage you have it, and God said, it's all about God speaking and the power of His word and God said and it happened, let there be light, light obeyed Him, days and night obeyed Him because His word is so, so hugely important and that links as I said before with John 1 in the beginning was the word is the person of God. He chooses to reveal

Himself as a communication, as a word. So the word is really important. If your Christianity consists of a closed Bible, then you'll utterly struggle to carry on being a Christian. If you have no interest in the word, if you have no time to study the word, if you're not a disciple of the word, then you can't be a disciple because it's the word, it's the living word of God. If you're married to someone and you never ever speak to them, it's going to be a rubbish marriage. There needs to be communication. If you're best friend, you never speak to them, it's going to be a hopeless relationship. And God says, I speak to you, you speak to me, and I speak primarily through this living word. And so we have God's power will be revealed through His word. Don't lose confidence in the word. Don't listen or listen but refute those who say the words is meaningless because we recognize it as God's gift and we recognize it as the way God has chosen to reveal Himself to us. So the power of His word is absolutely important. And this church must revolve around the word, the living word of God, the preaching of the word, the teaching of the word, the living of the word in our lives. I was speaking to someone the other night for a long time, two in the morning, who was confused about their faith and who was living, this person was living a fairly

Christian life, no one in the city, you don't need to try to guess. But they were talking about faith and they maintained their faith. It was a faith, it's a strange faith, it's a faith that was separated from obedience, from the word, from living as a Christian.

[15 : 45] Strange, strange thing that people say, I still love, or I still have faith in Jesus, but I had no impact on their life because the word was closed, you see, the Bible was closed in his life, in a person's life. The Bible needs to be open, we need to be submissive to the word because it's not a formula and it's not a textbook, it's a living word of God. So it's a God who reveals his power, it's also a God who reveals his creative genius and order. We did the fruit of the Spirit, haven't we, and one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. And I think part of that is a revelation of God's character, who's a God of, and this appeals to my OCD nature, a God of pattern and a God of order, not of disorder, a God of complexity as well as simplicity, because you see in the pattern of creation, and I'm not going to go into it, even in these, this is very much formulaic, it's chapter, it's a formula, it's ordered in a very specific way, it moves from simplicity to complexity, starts with just a kind of primeval soup, you know, at the very beginning, darkness was over the surface of the deep, the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters, it's a kind of just a, you know, maybe I'm taking it, is that a scientific term, primeval soup? I'm not a scientist, I don't know, but it's just that kind of beginnings, and then we have this big bang to use creative, evolution or scientific language, a big bang of creation, no real problem with a big bang theory, because I'm sure there was a big bang when God created it, and the way He created it, but it moves into great complexity, and ends up of course with mankind, in that amazing complexity, the complexity of the human being, great computers today they could do amazing things, but we're the ones that made them, and they can never do the things that we do, but there's separations right through this, this is like a layered cake, there's separations light from darkness, water from water, land from sea, so you've got that separation happening and more complexity, and then in the other verses you go back to these separations being filled out, the light and darkness being filled with the sun and the moon, the water being separated out and there's fish and there's birds, and there's land and sea, there's animals and mankind, and it's all developing, there's a clear purpose, there's even a task beginning to involve a looking after the universe that will happen for mankind when He is created.

But the other thing He reveals about God is His goodness, seven times He makes the declaration, it is good.

Now that isn't just a throwaway comment, it's the foundation of everything we believe about the character of God, that He has made a good world, He made a good world which we go on to see has been despoiled, not today, but we'll see that.

But this is important, it's important because some people say, not Christians I hope, but some people in the past have said that matter is evil, that all that matters is our soul, our spirit and this world is bad.

Now we know it's been corrupted and it's been bruised and it's been cursed and judged by God, but God made this physical earth absolutely completely good.

[19 : 52] Good, it was a beautiful environment, nature is absolutely good and the destruction and the disorder do not come from God, His creation is absolutely good and that is because He is absolutely good.

Now when we struggle with badness, when we struggle with evil, when we struggle with death, when we struggle with circumstances we can't understand, it's good to remember and it's important to put our faith in a God who is good, of course revealed primarily in redemption in Jesus Christ. And there may be even here, I'm not going to talk about this, but there may even be here a model working week that we have six days and the day of rest set apart, a model working week. But lastly and very briefly, what's our response to a chapter like this in our lives? Well, it must always be for us a response of faith.

We're asked to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Especially in the light of the fall and sin and the cross and renewed faith, Paul speaks about it in Romans 8 verse 18, I consider, and this is in the context of suffering, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

[21 : 27] The creation, this good, good, good, good, good creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

That's one of the aspects of faith we have today. January 1st, 2013 is that the best is still to come. This creation that was good, that has been spoiled, will one day be set free and we will be part of that in Christ.

We'll be part of that as Christians. And our future is a future that is physical and we're not going to be floating about on clouds playing, we might be playing harps, but it will be a real physical harp and it will be lots of other instruments as well.

But it will be good and physical and real and we'll reclaim and enjoy even more gloriously this creation that was made because it will be better.

It will be even better with new heavens and this new earth. You see that Paul uses that language of redemption, the same language that's used here in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

[22 : 52] Paul says we await the new heavens and the new earth, so there will be a recreation, physical and spiritual. That's a great thing to look forward to.

We are getting old and we are falling apart. It's a great thing to look forward to. The best is yet to come. What today, people who have drunk their way into the new year with no hope other than it's a new year and today well it's just another day isn't it, it's a new year but it's just another day, the best has been.

When you're growing older the best has always been. You're always longing for youth and these great days. We've got another confession to make just before we finish.

I watched Grease yesterday. That's a great American dream isn't it? The 1950s, early 60s, well late 50s, young, energetic, high school kids, got their lives ahead of them, blue skies, brilliant songs, beautiful men and women and that's the great dream but they're all old now.

They're all old and it's a beautiful dream and there's an element, I can see God in that because that's what it's meant to be.

[24 : 18] Not with all the stuff going around it but there's whispers there of the longings that people have for being together, for being young, happy and this creation that God has made.

No cares in the world, perfect relationships but we can recognise that is only fulfilled in Jesus and those who don't have Jesus have no better tomorrow really and if it is a better tomorrow it's only for a week while but the best for us is still to come.

So our response should be faith and worship. I hope that we can worship this Creator. Don't get hung up on the science of beginnings.

Don't argue for hours and hours and days about 24 hour creation and all that stuff. About the God who reveals himself as the one who's made us.

Don't be apologetic about it. Even the deepest, darkest atheist wants to know about beginnings and thinks about creation or at least a God who's behind it.

[25 : 24] We needn't be embarrassed in the slightest about it. Some of the greatest minds that I've ever been in this world are happily able to worship and serve the living God as Creator God.

And we can do that because we as Christians have new hearts, we've been born again. And there was a day when no one here could worship God because we were blind and dead, we were all blind and dead and we had no interest but he's touched our hearts and we love him now.

We love him, there's not many people can say that. He's given us a love for himself and we love him and that puts us going a different direction from everyone else. But we love him, we love him because he's changed us.

He's given us a new heart and I hope also it gives us a desire to obey him, to serve him because he's worth it.

Because he's eternal and we're not. Because he's made us and we're made in his image because we have sinned and rebelled against him and stuck our fingers up on him and he has redeemed us and brought us back and loves us eternally because he promises us the best is yet to come.

[26 : 39] He's worth it, he's worth it being. He's worth being first, he's worth being number one in our lives. It's great to see the hall filled today with people on the beginning of a new year coming to worship.

A great priority and may that be the priority of our life to worship and serve the living God. Amen.