

## **God's Greatest Dream Genesis 1 10/5/03**

This morning we begin a wonderful journey together. A journey that will take us 34 weeks to complete spread out over two years. It is the journey of God's people and so let's begin at the beginning with Genesis 1:1. The words are going to come up on the screen and I am going to read them one phrase at a time. Will you repeat after me and think about its significance. ***"In the beginning...God.... created... the heavens and the earth."*** I don't know if you have ever thought about it. But these words in its day and even still in our day today are the single most controversial and important sentence that has ever been written. In order to understand why you need to think about how the world was before these words were written. Thomas Cahill in his book writes: ***"Our culture, civilization, has been so shaped by the Old Testament that it's almost impossible to conceive how these words changed the world."*** Before these words were penned no one had ever heard there was a personal God who created all things. They had never heard that there was a God who desired to enter into communication and relationship with his creation. In the ancient world there was a multiplicity of gods. They fought and warred with each other. They got married and humans basically existed as pawns for these gods. No relationship, no sense of goodness or favor. The dominant worldview of various myths had the world filled with fallible, limited gods. And so people lived in fear. The fertility cults of the ancient world were characterized by sexual perversity that led to the worship of sun and moon and the belief that these bodies impacted daily life. Human sacrifice to influence the gods and their actions was part of most religions. Humans were simply slaves to do what the gods didn't want to do themselves. Most prayers were curses. Life was filled with violence and a search for dominance. Life was an endless cycle that rotated around the hub of death. Birth, life and death around and around. No purpose or destiny. No ultimate end or ultimate purpose. That was the world of the ancients. Into this destructive belief system comes these seven words "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". This book has changed the world

more than every other book put together. People have sacrificed their lives to translate this book and to get it to those who don't have it. This is God's great gift to us and now it is our time to understand it.

This morning we want to look at three core truths from Scripture that have to do with creation.

**Why did God create anything in the first place?** Richard Swinburn the great philosopher penned these words: *"Why does something exist rather than nothing."* Let's read Genesis 1:1-3 together:

*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.*

Let me point out something. In verse 1 we see the work of the Father. The first member of the Trinity, who created all things. James 1:17 tells us that he is the Father of every perfect gift. Verse 2 who is it hovering over the water? The Spirit of God. Hovering like a bird is the same image we find when Jesus is baptized. The Spirit comes down like a dove and hovers over Jesus. Verse 3 God creates by speaking his word and the opening words of John *in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and was God and dwelt amongst us*. Who was the Word? The Son. So in the first three verses we have a hint of the existence of the Trinity. The Father the Son and the Spirit.

Before Scripture is finished with this account it becomes real clear that the Trinity existed in community. And for us to kind of remember that I have set up these three chairs on the platform to show the teaching of scripture that before time the Trinity existed in love, joy, and delight. God did not create the world and everything in it because he was lonely or bored or need help but rather out of the richness of the community that the Trinity shared God said, "lets broaden the circle" Genesis 1:26 *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."* To create humans not as God but in our image to bask in

the fellowship of the Trinity. Jesus prayed in John 17:21 *that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.* This idea of community is so good, so rich and so beautiful lets create human beings and invite them in. There is an open chair. Why do we exist? Scripture says because God so delights in the goodness of community that he wants to expand it a billion times over. Listen to what Dallas Willard writes: *God's aim in history is the creation of an inclusive community of loving persons, with Himself included as its primary sustainer and most glorious inhabitant.*” That is the best single sentence definition of what God is up to in human history. An inclusive community of people with God at the center. We exist at the most fundamental level as a trinity of loving persons. I hope that every time you open Bible the Father, Son, and Spirit meets you there. Bask in this fellowship that God extends to us. Why does it exist because out of God's richness he says lets extend our community?

The second truth related to the doctrine of is this. **God wanted us to have a beautiful place to live out community.** That is why he created the universe. Very important distinction. There is an infinite difference between the creator and his creation. Infinite gap. People had a huge problem with that. Paul writes in Romans 1 that men stopped worshiping the creator and instead chose to worship the creation. The sun and the moon were worshiped as deities because it was believed that they existed as gods before anything else was created. The writer of Genesis wants to make real sure that we understand that is wrong thinking and a lie. Look at verses 3-5 *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.* . Day and night evening and morning, the first day. On what day was the sun created. Look at verse 14. *And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years,* Fourth day. What's up with that? Not confused or scientifically impaired. Sun

and moon are not eternal but created. Greater and lesser light. Sun and moon were gods in ancient times but their writer makes it real clear functions designed by God who can generate light without them. Don't worship creation. Worship creator. Now only primitive people do stuff like that. We choose to worship the god of Lexus and Beemer. There was an ad that said, "you can't buy happiness but now you can lease it". The doctrine of creation is addressed to people like us who struggle to avoid worshipping the creation and all the stuff around us. The purpose of creation is to show us how truly good God is. I remember several years ago we vacationed in Yellowstone. We woke up and there was a buffalo sleeping in front of our cabin door. We saw big horn sheep, buffalo, and deer, bald eagles and tons of unbelievable scenery. And again and again I reflected on the power and imagination of the God who created it all. Seven times or more it reads God speaking the worlds parts into existence and it was. The power of God is unbelievable. Let me ask you: Do you have that power in any sphere of your life? You do in your body. You say to your hand raise and it does. God has given you a tiny bit of the power he has over the universe. He speaks without effort and it is so. There is no other account of a God like that. The fancy word for that is. **God creates ex-nihilo.** From nothing. God speaks and there is stuff there. Other creation accounts work with the chaos that already exists. Only God can create from nothing. He created energy. Other reoccurring themes. And God saw it was.... Circle that word good as you read though. Over and over again. He takes endless delight in what he creates. Little reflections of that in us. Verse 24. ***And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and 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.*** God saw that it was good and God blessed them. Imagine what that was like blessing the creatures he delighted in. Ever have a pet? Like animals? Why love them so much? Because God made them and loved them.

I am not so sure about cats. Look at the delight of a little kid with a puppy. Great line from GK Chesterton. We get tired with stuff but not God ***“For we have sinned and grown old and our Father is younger than we”***. He has the boundless appetite for goodness and delight that we sadly grow out of. Did you know that there is no word for nature in the Hebrew language? They used the word creation because they didn’t believe anything existed naturally. God made it and sustained it. God’s fingerprints are everywhere. You will notice that in Psalms. Two greatest places of worship were the temple and creation. The heavens are telling the glory of God. Where did Jesus go to meet the Father? Out in creation. During this challenge take it out and read in creation. As you are walking through the park or snowmobiling around Vermillion stop, turn off the engine and read from this book about the God who made it all. Read the expression of God in written form as you read it in created form. Go out and look at the stars. Marvel and thank God for his goodness. One other observation. We should be the greatest environmentalists in the world. This is not our house. God loves it and we ought to take real good care of it.

Third observation of the doctrine of creation. **The climax of creation is the creation of human beings.** So important it is told twice. 1:26 f and then again in chapter 2. Two aspects. The first is that we are humble, finite creatures. Everything else God speaks into existence. Not with human beings 2:7 ***the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*** He reaches down and forms us out of dust of earth. 3:19 ***By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.*** Little dust bunnies. Erma Bombeck wanted her tombstone to read, ***“Big deal. I’m used to dust”***. The dominant worldview says we are nothing more than apes with opposable thumbs. Dust bunnies. A composition of chemicals. This is not what Genesis' says? We are that but we are also the climax of creation. We are made verse 27 ***So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he***

*created him; male and female he created them.* In the image of God. Another important phrase. Run into it at times. Latin or theological *imago dei*. The image of God. The writer of Genesis does not define it completely. It has to do with us being moral agents who can enter into relationship and build community. In the image he created them male and female with the capacity of community co-bearers of divine image. That is why we say around here people matter to God. The world heard that message for the first time in the words of Genesis. It was unheard of before then. 1: 28 God blessed them by bestowing enhanced and abundant life. He provides food for them in verse 29. Every fruit bearing tree and what grows in the ground. Only a vegetarian diet. How can that be Paradise? You will have to answer that yourself. John Ortberg believes that vegetables didn't taste like vegetables until after the fall. God provides food in a way that is not destructive to the rest of creation. 2:15 tells us that God gave them work to do. Why didn't he make it self-caring? Left it unfinished because he made us with need to contribute and add value. When you stop doing work you start to die. I have great concern for retirement years for people who stop giving themselves to being productive. God invites us to partner to be co-regents with him have dominion amazing dignity. But God didn't just make us to work 2:18 God saw that it was good but in 2:18 God saw it was not good. Man to be alone. A companion and community. So he parades all the animals to see if any are his type. He names them and that means studying them learning adding value but for Adam no suitable helper. Adam says they look great but none of them is my type. So God creates woman and Adam says, "my type!" Hebrew poetry is very clear here. she is "isha" because she is taken out of "ish". Adam sees and says, "wo man". It is a play on words throughout study of OT. Delight in words. She is called his helper but it is not the role of being a gopher or subordinate. It is the word that is most often used of God. He is our helper and in the context it means companion. The one with whom I enjoy community. It is the signature of God. Male and female  $1+1 = 1$  God's math is really easy. You are 12 tribes but one people. How good when brothers and sisters dwell in

unity? Community is good. The Rabbi's identified 613 commands in the Scripture and the first one is found here, "be fruitful and multiply". Adam says, "I think I can handle that one!" Next week we go on to a shattered community and how God would restore it.

Let me close by saying just a few words about the challenge. Why are we doing this? Because we are people of the book. Most people here found God through the message of this book. This is the Bible Jesus used and knew. A lot of people say they believe it but never read it. In heaven Zephaniah comes up and says "how did you like my book?" You had a bad location after Habakkuk. Learn more about Scripture that we ever has as a church together. Our goal is to be fully devoted followers of Jesus and this is the book that shaped Jesus life. Heard at bedtime. Psalms he read and prayed words he quoted from temptation to last breaths on cross. Our goal is to come to know, love and serve the Father as Jesus did and to meet with Him where Jesus did. As you read how to make it your own. John Adams wrote all over his books. In one book he had 10,000 words in the margins. Wrote more in flyleaf. Is it ok in Bible? Good size margins.

Symbols we can use together.

**? - Means what's up with that?** Have any of you ever found anything in OT not sure of? One resource go to danderson @ridgewoodchurch.info. Study with Bridge and bring questions. Don't allow what is unclear to dominate. Major on what is clear. Read it like a love letter.

**! Exclamation pt. I need to change.** Satan will try to get you to focus on confuse rather than what is real clear. Am I in compliance with what I understand?

**The heart.** Luke 24:32 how our hearts burned on road to Emmaus. Maybe put date.

**Triangle.** Attributes of God make that symbol. Stands for Trinity. He is primary focus.

Let's pray for each other as we begin to submit ourselves to God's Word. Our world is like OT violence confusion hungering for God and sometimes wondering where he is. That is the world of the OT people and we are there right now since 9/11. Like the people for whom it was first written

we are called to be the keepers of god's community in a broken world. There are high stakes here. This book shapes us as we seek to keep the dream. We are busy etc sin grabs us. PRAY. For yourself and that one next to you. That God will meet him or her in your word this year. Help him or her to read it faithfully, come to know you better, defeat sin, meet him or her in your word.

**(Material from Willow Creek "Old Testament Challenge" used)**