



A story is told of Mahatma Gandhi, who was a Hindu, as he studied the Bible: “You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilization to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of good literature.” The Bible. Have we forgotten that it’s dynamite?

We live in the information age. By one estimate, the world produced 5 exabytes, or 1 quintillion bytes, of information in the year 2002. That’s the same amount of information churned out between 25,000 B.C. and 2,000 A.D. All of us suffer from information overload. A tidal wave of information attacks us everyday. It’s crushing us. We don’t need more information...we need something else.

This is our first sermon in Genesis. Genesis is composed of 50 chapters, 1,533 verses in our English translation. It’s a book that lays the foundation for the rest of the Bible. Genesis is a book about beginnings. It’s a story. It’s the beginning of the story of the whole Bible. Genesis takes us back to the beginning of the world. It tells us about the origins of the world, the human race, and God’s purposes for his world. Genesis teaches us foundational truths about who God is, who we are, and why the world is the way it is.

Genesis shouldn’t be read as a science textbook, as though this book were written to answer all of our modern day scientific questions. It was written a long time ago. Genesis was written by Moses as the Israelites were traveling through the desert, preparing to enter the Promised Land. It was written to correct and shape Israel’s worldview. It gave Israel the true story of who God is, how this world came to be, and where it’s all going.

We’re not wandering through the same desert as ancient Israel, we’re not facing the same enemies, but we feel the same fear. We’re staring chaos and uncertainty in the face, and we don’t need more facts or information—we need a story.

William Kilpatrick writes: “The same impulse that makes us want our books to have a plot makes us want our lives to have a plot. We need to feel that we are getting somewhere, making progress. There is something in us that is not satisfied with a merely psychological explanation of our lives. It doesn’t do justice to our conviction that we are on some kind of journey or quest, that there must be some deeper meaning to our lives than whether we feel good about ourselves. Only people who have lost the sense of adventure, mystery, and romance worry about

their self-esteem. And at that point what they need is not a good therapist, but a good story. Or more precisely, the central question for us should not be, ‘What personality dynamics explain my behavior?’ but rather, ‘What sort of story am I in?’”

What sort of story are you in? Morgan Freeman wanted to know the answer to this question in the movie *The Bucket List*. He thought he had to climb a mountain in the Himalayas to hear God’s voice. You don’t have to climb a mountain to hear God’s voice. God has spoken to us in his Word. We first hear his voice in Genesis 1, the start of the story. Before the Bible was written, it was spoken. The ancient Hebrews didn’t **read** God’s Word, they **heard** God’s Word.

Who is this story about?

Who is this story about? Like the famous first line from one of the bestselling books of all time, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, “It’s not about you.” This story, this Bible, this life, your life—it’s not about you, it’s about God.

How many times does the name **God** appear in this first chapter of the Bible? 35 times! How do we miss this? The most important words of the Bible are the first four words of the Bible: “*In the beginning, God.*” This is a story about God.

Derek Kidner said: “It is no accident that God is the subject of the first sentence of the Bible, for this word dominates the whole chapter and catches the eye at every point of the page: it is used some 35 times in as many verses of the story. The passage, indeed the Book, is about him first of all; to read it with any other primary interest (which is all too possible) is to misread it.”

At the age of 20, a sentence from a book written by A.W. Tozer, changed my life: “The most important thing about us is what comes into our minds when we think about God.” What comes into your mind when you think about God? Everybody is a theologian. The question is, are you a good theologian? Genesis makes us good theologians.

“*In the beginning, God.*” The Bible opens with God already there; it makes no attempt to prove the existence of God. God is beyond proof. God is simply there. What was God doing before the beginning? We’ll talk about that next week.

Psalm 14:1 says, “*The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’*” You have two stories to choose from: either, “*In the beginning, God*”—God is God and he created this world you live in; or, you choose a story that has no beginning, no God, and no meaning.

If that's the story you choose to live in, then to be consistent you must agree with what atheist Bertrand Russell said nearly a century ago: "That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of all the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins — all these things...are so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand." You can stand on an "accidental collocation of atoms," or, "In the beginning, God."

Before Genesis was ever written, the surrounding nations and cultures—the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Cannannites—all had their own creation account. The Babylonian creation account, called *Enuma Elish*, says that the world was full of multiple gods who were at war with each other—malicious, unpredictable gods—and the physical world came out of the conflict between these warring gods. The story goes that Marduk (the god of storm) killed Tiamat (god of water), then cut her body in half and created the universe from the two halves of her body. And like the Babylonians, the Egyptians and the Cannannites worshipped the sun, the moon, birds, fish, and stars.

Genesis must be understood against this backdrop. The people of God are in the desert, under the starry night sky, surrounded by powerful nations with a very different understanding of the world. We need to hear Genesis 1 the way ancient Israel heard it. Out there in the desert they weren't concerned about the age of the earth or wondering if the days of creation were literal 24 hour days.

Genesis 1 is about the one true God and it's a putdown to the false gods of the surrounding nations, declaring that they are not gods at all, but creations of the one true God. Each day of creation dismisses a deity worshipped and feared by the surrounding nations. On the first day, the gods of light and darkness are dismissed. On the second day, the gods of sky and sea. On the third day, gods of earth and gods of vegetation. On the fourth day, bird and fish gods dismissed. On the fifth and sixth days, any association of divinity with the animal kingdom or with humans, is taken away.

Sitting there under the stars that their pagan neighbors worshipped, Genesis 1 taught Israel that everything their pagan neighbors worship, God created. God is sovereign over everything, over every star in the sky, every fish in the sea, and every follicle of hair on every human head. Genesis 1 was written to teach Israel and to teach us that our destiny is not in the hands of

warring gods, or in the alignment of the stars, or the decisions of human kings, or whatever idols we might bow down and worship, but in the hands of the sovereign God of the universe.

This story is about God. Did you hear all the verbs in this story that have God as their subject? God **created** (*bara*—used only of God). God **said**. God **saw**. God **separated**. God **called**. God **made**. God **set**. God **blessed**. God **finished**.

Genesis 1 isn't so much about explanation as it is exultation, or worship. God is God and you are not. Or as one writer puts it, "God is God and we are **wee**." All creation is by God and for God. It's all for his glory. Genesis 1, and your whole Bible, is a story about God and about his glory; it's not about you.

The only story that's big enough to make sense of your life, and sense of this world, and sense of all the information that comes at you, is a story that's centered on God, not yourself. And this is so freeing! Your relationship with God ought to look a lot like your relationship with the Grand Canyon. What do you do when you go to the Grand Canyon? You don't take pictures of just yourself! You take pictures of the Grand Canyon!

You must understand your part in the story. You are a character in the story. Your loved ones and your enemies also have roles to play in the story, but the story is about God and for God. And if you forget this, if you forget Psalm 115:1, "**Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory,**" then you'll live your life sitting in the minivan taking photographs of yourself when just outside the door sits the Grand Canyon for you to explore. It's not "In the beginning, Me." It's, "In the beginning, God."

How is this story shaped?

Verse 1 tells us that God "**created the heavens and the earth.**" Verse 2 tells us about this initial state of creation. Verse 2 says the earth was "**without form and void**" the Hebrew word is *tohu wa-bohu*. The earth was without form: it has no structure. The earth was void: it has no contents. The earth is without form and void: it is uninhabitable and uninhabited.

Verse 2 tells us that this initial state of creation is covered in darkness. At this point creation is pitch-black nothingness; nothing can grow or live. It's chaos; a lump of clay without any form. But in six days God turns the chaos into cosmos. The first three days God forms the cosmos—he reverses "without form." The last three days God fills the cosmos—he reverses "void."

God's creation is orderly. Days 1-3 are days of forming, and Days 4-6 are days of filling. And there's a beautiful rhythm that runs through the 7 days of creation. As you move through each day you see these same components: Announcement: "**And God said.**" Commandment: "**Let there be.**" Fulfillment: "**And it was so.**" Naming: "**And God called.**" Evaluation: "**And God saw that it was good.**" Conclusion: "**And there was evening and there was morning, day 1.**"

By day 7 God has completed his creation. Throughout the Bible, 7 is a number that represents completion and perfection. It's inescapable that Genesis presents creation in 7 days. How do we interpret these 7 days? There are three main interpretations. First: **days** are literal 24 hour periods. Second: **days** are representative of extended ages, long periods of time. Third: **7 days** are a literary framework designed to illustrate the orderly nature of God's creation and to call God's people to order their lives after him.

Personally, I think the third interpretation is consistent with Genesis' emphasis on theology, not science. The presentation of creation through 7 "days" reveals God's sovereign ordering of creation and his care to present the story of the beginning of the universe to us in understandable terms.

Let's remember, Genesis wasn't written to cause debates or fights about creation, but to prompt worship of the Creator and to extinguish the false worship of the surrounding cultures. And let's remember that every culture and age is going to have a different issue with Genesis 1. In John Calvin's day, the 16th century, the issue wasn't "how could God have created the world in 7 days?", it was, "Why did it take God so long to create the world?"

This is our story. God takes chaos and turns it into cosmos. He brings beautiful order to the universe. Do you know that God can do the same thing to your life?

How does God create? With his word. God's first word takes on darkness. Imagine the original scene. Close your eyes. All is pitch-black nothingness. It's so dark. Then God speaks: "Let there be light!" And everything is bright.

It's not until day 4 that God creates the sun, moon, and stars. So where is this light coming from? Revelation tells us that the new heaven and new earth God is preparing for us "*has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb,*" Jesus. This light is the glory of God—Father, Son, and Spirit—their stunning glory lighting up the universe. God speaks, "Let there be light," and everything changes, everything becomes bright.

Are you hearing the story? Do you see who God is? To come under God's word is to go from darkness to light. Do you know that God can do the same thing to your life?

What does God say about his creation? What adjective does God use to evaluate his creation? **Good**. God declares his creation **good**. God declares day 5 of his creation **good**. On this day God created sea creatures to fill the sea and birds to fill the air. God looks down upon Great White sharks, and octopuses, sea horses, and tuna fish, star fish and sea turtles, and he says **good**. What a Creator!

God looks down at the hummingbirds he placed in the sky. Have you seen a hummingbird recently? Hummingbirds are about 3 inches long. They weigh less than a penny, yet they can flutter

their wings 78x per second to hover over a flower. They can fly non-stop over the Gulf of Mexico, 500 miles. Hummingbirds were God's idea. God looks at hummingbirds and says, **good**. "I like these little hummingbirds that I've made."

The earth is big, it sits in a big universe (we don't know how big). On October 19, 2009, European astronomers announced the discovery of 32 new planets that are just a few times larger than the earth, orbiting stars just outside of our solar system. The earth is part of the Milky Way Galaxy. If you could count the billions of stars in our galaxy and were able to count 1 star per second, it would take you 2,500 years to count them all. The Whirlpool Galaxy is 31 million light years away. Every second a new star is formed in this galaxy. Galaxies, planets, Great White sharks and hummingbirds—God created them all and calls them **good**.

Genesis was and is an intellectually revolutionary document. When this creation story first arrived on the scene it revolutionized how people viewed the material world. It challenged the two great errors people and religions make: materialism and spiritualism. Materialists: this world is all there is; let's worship it or let's exploit it. Spiritualists: the spiritual world is what's important, not the material world; let's live ascetic lives and distance ourselves from creation. Genesis: God created the material world, and he declared his creation **good**. He means for us to enjoy his creation and for our interaction with creation to be a way of worshipping him, the Creator.

Are you following the story? This revolutionary story is about God. A God who creates the Milky Way, my favorite bird—buzzards—and you, and he declares it **good**.

How do we live in this story?

Our final question: How do we live in this story? Every paragraph of the Bible is covenantal, is based upon a covenant relationship between God and his people. The Bible doesn't just give us information. Everything in the Bible is script, all the information here is meant for obedience, meant to show us how to live. What lines is this story calling us to act out?

I don't know your story, I don't know where you've been or what's going on in your life right now, but there's so much hope for you. There's no heart so dark that God can't shine his light into it. There's no circumstances so chaotic that God can't transform into a beautifully ordered creation. You might feel like your life is without form and void. There's no life so empty that God can't fill with a new story and a new song.

I know this because God so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world so that all who believe in him would not perish, but have eternal life, new life. Jesus, the light of the world, came into the world and hung on a cross, and there all the darkness of death and decay and disorder swallowed up his life so that he could give you a new life.

I don't know your story, but there was evening and there was morning and that was yesterday. Today is a new day and the light of the world can overcome all your darkness and give you a part in his big story. Have you accepted Jesus into your life as your Creator? The light of the world who created in the beginning is also here right now and he can recreate you.

How do we live in this story? Two ways. First, begin all your thinking with the first four words of the Bible: *"In the beginning, God."* This is the source of all of our troubles. We come at all of our thinking and living, our whole approach to life, with ourselves at the start rather than God. And if we fail right here, we'll fail everywhere. If we get the start of the story wrong, the rest of the story won't work.

Bernard Bell said: "We too easily give our devotion to that which has not created us. But more subtly, we align God to our programs rather than aligning ourselves to God's program. This is what happens when our thinking begins with self not with God.... We fail to start with the first verse of the Bible: 'In the beginning God.'...If your thinking does not rest on God but on yourself, if you forget 'In the beginning God,' if you have too small a view of God or too high a view of self, then you are placing too great a burden on yourself, a burden you were not made to carry."

What would it look like if your thinking began with *"In the beginning, God"*? I think it would look like walking in an entirely new direction. I think this calls most of us to change our whole approach to God and life. Instead of waking up in the morning and listening to those automatic thoughts in our head and coming to God and Scripture and prayer with ourselves at the center, we line up at an entirely different starting line.

Very practically, this is what I'm saying: *"In the beginning, God,"* that's where we start. Practically. Meditate on God's word. Don't come at God or come at your day by beginning with your fears and troubles. Begin by meditating on God's word. Start with his words, not yours. Meditate on God's word until it sinks into your mind and heart, then do the other stuff. God is the author of this story we're living in and we take all our cues from what he says. So we must start there. It's a complete shift in voice. You start all of your thinking with God's voice, not your voice or anyone else's. Eugene Peterson says prayer is really "answering God."

C.S. Lewis discovered: "The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life coming flowing in."

It's a voice choice. Are you going to come at your day starting with and meditating on the voice who created galaxies, or the tidal wave of voices in your head and in your world that are pounding the life out of you? This is building a new habit for many of us. It's going to take time and work, but the fruit will come.

You are what you meditate on. What do you meditate on all day? What do your thoughts orbit around? Most of your troubles come because the solar system of your thought life is orbiting around the wrong center. You've got to wake up in the morning and start with *"In the beginning, God."* Then, you've got to keep preaching that to yourself all day long.

Second, become a kid again. How old have you become? Become a kid again. Children come into the world full of wonder and play. The world is their playground and they marvel over it. And I dare say wonder and play are very close to worship.

Of all people, Christians should enjoy creation. Of all people, Christians must not be solemn, but full of wonder and play. This is our Father's world and we ought to enjoy it as his children. What is the point of all this beauty in the world? The view from that mountaintop, that sunset, tonight's starlight sky, it's there to tell us that God is great.

Become a kid again. Wonder. Play. Relax. At least once a day look up at the sky and remind yourself that you are on a planet orbiting thousands of miles per hour around a blazing hot sun with beautiful and mysterious things above and about you.

Peter Kreeft said: "Every atom in the quadrillion-mile universe and every 'chance' event in its trillion-year history is deliberated and perfectly planned and controlled by God for the ultimate end of our good, our heavenly joy. Galaxies revolve and dinosaurs breed and rain falls and people fall in love and uncles smoke cheap cigars and people lose their jobs and we all die—all for our good, the finished product, God's work of art, the kingdom of Heaven."

Our Bible begins with four words: *"In the beginning, God"* and our Bible ends with Jesus saying four words: *"I am coming soon."* We know how this story begins and we know how it ends, or better said, how it reaches its true beginning.

What this world needs is people with a story. People who know where they've come from and know where they're going and know who it's all about. Your life is God's. Live it for him. Begin all your thinking with *"In the beginning, God."* Meditate on his voice. Become a kid again: be full of wonder and play and worship. You will see him soon. The world needs this story.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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