

GENESIS 1:1-25 (1)

THE GREAT AUTHOR OF THE STORY

Have you ever arrived at the theater after the start of the movie? I know it is tough to do with all the previews and commercials - but it is still possible! When you arrive late, you have a real problem, because if you miss the first part of the movie, you may be unable to understand or appreciate the rest of the movie. If you are going to get the story straight, you have to know the story from the start.

In 2010, we are journeying together through God's story and our story. This drama unfolds through five scenes: creation, fall, redemption, mission and glory. The first scene is the story of creation. If you are going to get this story straight, you have to know the story from the start.

Yet the start of the story is one of the most controversial parts of the story. One of the great arguments of our day is the dispute between creationists and evolutionists. Creation and evolution present two radically different views of the start of the world. This battle has become more prominent in recent years, as aggressive atheists have taken the lead in the evolutionary movement, and as creationists have more publicly pressed their views.

Yet the controversy is not just between creationists and evolutionists. It is also between the different kinds of creationists. Even within the church, there are many opinions about when and how God created the heavens and the earth. Some believe the earth is old, and God created over a very long period of time. Others believe the earth is young, and God created in six 24-hour days.

I have covered a lot of ground in just a few words, and I do not intend to labor through many of the details of these controversies. Others can do that far better than me. But if you claim faith in Jesus Christ today, you need to remember that Christianity is a revealed faith. We believe what we believe because God has revealed his truth to us in the Bible. So if we claim to be Christians, we must accept the creation story as:

1. Historical. What we read here, is meant to describe real events.
2. Reliable. What we read here, is meant to describe real events, accurately.
3. Profitable. What we read here, is meant to describe real events, for our benefit.

Here is how I want to approach the Genesis description of creation. Let's focus on what we DO know, instead of what we DO NOT know. I read what some Christians write about it, and my general reaction is, "Maybe, but maybe not." The human heart wants to speculate. But if we spend all of our energy on what we do not know, we may miss what we do and should know. If we do this, we will not be so different than Adam and Eve in the garden, who gave into the temptation to be unsatisfied with what God had said to them and given to them. Let's not say, "God, you didn't tell us enough or give us enough." Let's see what he did tell us and did give us, and let's trust him for what we do not know.

This week and next week, I will give you only a taste of all that could be said about the first part of the creation story. But if we focus on what we do know, and what we should know, we will become better at living well in our part of the story.

Today, we discover three glorious truths about God, the great Author of our story. The story of creation reveals that he is personal, that he is purposeful, and that he is powerful. But this is not just a list. This is crucial for the way we live in our part of the story.

He is **PERSONAL**. We are people who exist because of A PERSON. We read in verse 1, "In the beginning, God..."

We cannot miss this: this is a declaration of personality. Creation is not the result of some impersonal, indefinable, unknowable cosmic force. Creation is not the accumulation, explosion and organization of atoms, by another group of atoms. A real person with a real identity has done this amazing work of creation.

We also cannot miss this: this is a declaration of exclusivity. Verse 1 reads, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We believe Moses wrote Genesis, and this is Moses' way of saying that God created everything, everywhere. This personal God is not one of many gods. This personal God did not

just create part of the earth, or just the earth, or just some of the heavens, or just the heavens. He is not a regional god. He personally created all that was, all that is, and all that ever will be.

He is personal. He is a person. Yet as we read this story, we wonder about this question: does this God exist in THREE PERSONS?

We read in verse 2, “The Spirit of the Lord was hovering over the waters.” This seems to be a distinct Person. This Spirit is in union with the God we meet in the first verse, but this Person seems to have a personal, particular role in all of this.

At the start of the next section, in verse 26, we read, “Let us make man in our image...” This is another indication that not just one Person is present.

Then, if you skip ahead to the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Colossians, you read, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth...” “He” is Jesus.

Add this all up, and you have what the Bible never pushes on us, but clearly presents to us: God exists in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All were present at the creation. God is a personal God of relationship, and relationship exists within the three Persons of the Trinity.

He is personal - one God, existing in three persons. But what does that mean for us? How does this truth touch our story? Doesn’t it stand to reason that if a personal God made this world, this personal God is interested in this world? You may say, “Maybe not. Maybe God just made it, then walked away and let it all go in whatever direction it wishes to go.” Maybe, but does that really make sense?

What if you create what others would call a “masterpiece”? Maybe you paint a painting, or craft a sculpture, or compose a piece of music, or pen a fine piece of literature - or maybe you even invent a wonderful gadget that will make life better for everyone. What would you do with it? Would you put it in a box and forget about it? Would you give it to someone else, and let them do whatever they want with it? Would you toss it in the trash?

You would guard it jealously and care for it passionately. In the same way, the creation story reveals a personal God who personally cares about his creation. Our story...your story...my story...the story of this world - is important to him. It’s not that he needs us. It’s not that somehow his existence is unfulfilling without us. But the personal God has personally chosen to create - you, me, and the heavens and the earth. And because he is personal, he personally cares about his masterpiece - his creation.

Think of life in an impersonal world. Who is great and good enough to care for you? Maybe other people care about you, but in an impersonal world, they are as helpless and hopeless as you are. But if we are here because of this personal God, we can be confident that we are held in the hand of One who is far better than impersonal, indefinable, unknowable cosmic forces.

In this, I find joy. In this, I find comfort. In this, I find hope. In this, I find peace. One God, in three Persons, has made this masterpiece and cares for this masterpiece. He is personal.

As well, he is **PURPOSEFUL**. He **PURPOSED TO START** this world.

Think again of the first few words: “In the beginning...” This personal God purposed to make a beginning to all of this. He existed before he created what we call the creation, and at some point in what we call “time,” he purposed to begin this process of creation.

Now don’t think too hard about this! We cannot fully grasp ideas like “eternity” and “time.” We want to say, “Where was God before the creation?” We want to say, “What was before the beginning?” We don’t know. But we know God has created and revealed the idea of “beginning.” At some point, in some place, in some way, God purposed to begin this creation.

Then he **PURPOSED TO CONTINUE** this creation. As you read through the six days of the creation story, you discover these words again and again: “Let there...” Let there be light. Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water. Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let the dry ground appear. And so on. God did not start the creation, then walk away. God did not create the

world, then discard the world. He had a purpose in beginning, and he had a purpose in continuing to create, and he has a purpose in upholding, sustaining, and providing for what he has created.

Think again of your “masterpiece.” Why did you make it? Maybe you wanted to give a gift to a loved one. Maybe you wanted to add beauty to a world with ugliness. Maybe you wanted to proudly show people you could do it. Maybe you wanted to make money. Maybe you really wanted to help people. Maybe you were bored. Your reasons may have been good or bad, but you had your reasons. You had your purposes.

God is purposeful. What does that mean for us? How does that truth touch our story? We know the world is here for a reason, and we are here for a reason. We are not here because of blind, dumb, freaky chance. We also know this purpose continues to this day. In some faiths, history is seen as an endless cycle. In this view, we are like hamsters in a cage, going around and around and around. But from the creation story, we discover that the great Author of the story is purposefully and purposely moving history in a direction. It had a first scene, it has more scenes after the first, and one day it will have a final scene.

This is good news! Have you ever come home at the end of a day of work or school, tired to the bone, sat down, and wondered why in the world you spent the day doing what you did? Or have you ever suffered in a way that seemed senseless to you? Or do you sit and watch the world pass from decade to decade, and despair through the seemingly endless foolishness and destruction? Have you ever felt like you were living in the world of Seinfeld, which was a television show about...nothing?

I don't know about you, but I need to be reminded that I am not a hamster in a cage. Because I live before a personal and purposeful God, I know this story is about something. We would need the rest of the Bible and the rest of the day to define and describe all of God's purposes, but we gain courage when we know that the Creator has a purpose. There is purpose in work. There is purpose in suffering. There is purpose in the events we live and see. Life is more than a mindless and meaningless television program.

Young people, I especially want you to hear that. There is much that makes my heart heavy about the world we are leaving to you, but my heart is heaviest when I think you don't see a purpose for life. It's all a game. It's all a joke. It's all nothing about nothing. We are just here to get all we can, and then we die.

Young people and all people - see that there is purpose in God's creation and in your life, and live with purpose! Don't waste your life! Today - resolve to be resolved to live with purpose before the God who had a purpose in making you and your world. Don't let the foolishness and emptiness of your culture suck you into the vacuum of meaninglessness. You are here for a reason. You are fearfully and wonderfully made by a personal and purposeful God. Discover a reason to live, and live with your heart fixed on the One who gave you life and purpose.

He is personal. He is purposeful. Then, as we read Genesis 1 to learn about the great Author of the story, we discover that he is **POWERFUL**.

I love this phrase: “herding cats.” It reminds me of why I am beginning to like dogs more, because if you call out to a dog, he or she will listen to you - at least some of the time. But cats go wherever they want to go, and do whatever they want to do.

With animals, and in many other ways, we want our words to be powerful, but often they are not. God's words are always powerful. If you have never noticed this before, notice this now: “And God said...” And God said. And God said. God said, and by the mere power of his spoken word, it was so. I can't herd a little cat with my words. He herded the universe - all of its planets and stars and galaxies - with a word.

He is powerful. Do you ever just stop and look? Maybe it is on a clear, starry night. Maybe it is at the top of a hill overlooking a city. Maybe it is on the edge of a large body of water. Or maybe it is as you hold the cat you finally caught. Or maybe it is as you look at a flower. Or maybe it is as you look at the amazing features of your hand. What must be the power of this personal, purposeful God, to create all of this with mere words?

Think one more time of that masterpiece. Why is it so wonderful? You have done what only you could do. You have created where there was nothing. You have used your gifts and abilities to make something new.

That is the powerful work of the powerful God in all of creation. So I ask again: what does this mean for us? How does that truth touch our story?

First, this power should TAKE US DOWN. It should deeply humble us. Do you think you are great? Do you think you are good? Stand before the God who created all things by the power of his word. You are nothing. You are only anything, if he gives you something. John Calvin once wrote, “How can the thought of God penetrate your mind without your realizing immediately that, since you are his handiwork, you have been made over and bound to his command by right of creation, that you owe your life to him?”

If we are humbled in this way, we will be called to worship. This is not the time for me to tell you to make sure you get to church next Sunday, or to give you a lecture about styles of worship. I simply want to speak to your heart. Worship is the offering of our praise, our prayers, our gifts and our lives to this One who is so worthy. If you have even a hint of how powerful this God is, how can your heart be turned in any direction, but toward worship?

If we are humbled in this way, we will also be called to discipleship. A disciple is a follower. Every one of us is a follower. We may follow ourselves and our desires, or we may follow another person and their desires, or we may follow our world and its desires. If you have even a hint of how powerful this God is, why would you ever want to follow anyone but him?

Yet this is true, too. God’s power should take us down, but it also should LIFT US UP. We look ahead to the rest of the story here, but when we look, we see Jesus, present at creation, coming in power to live, die and rise for sinners like us. He is the Creator who never grows weary, while we are creatures who grow weary in body and spirit. As we will see, the story includes our fall from the fullness of creation glory, and this results in both sin and weakness.

Where is strength? Where is help? Where is One who can lift us up from the depths of our sin and failure and misery and grief and all the other burdens of this story? It is the powerful Son of God, whose glory is written on every page of this story. Maybe you are feeling those burdens today. Young or old, maybe the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual challenges of this world are more than you can bear. Look to him. Seek him. Grab hold of him, confident that by his grace, he is grabbing hold of you. Live by his power for your part of this story.

As I think of creation, I am reminded of the words of author Donald Miller: “I can no more understand the totality of God than the pancake I made for breakfast understands the complexity of me.” Who can comprehend the greatness of God? Who can unravel the mysteries of creation? For all we think we know, there is so much we do not know.

But we do know this: the story of our world, and the story of our lives, is a story written by a personal, purposeful, powerful God. He cares for us. He gives us a reason to live. And by the grace of his Son, he forgives our sins, adopts us as sons and daughters, and gives us his Spirit, so that we may live with him and for him.

For all I do not know, I do know this, and this shapes all the scenes of my story.