



good shepherd
presbyterian church

Creation

Genesis 1-11; Psalm 24:1-6

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What is the Bible? Could you tell the story of the Bible? This summer we are embarking on a series to help you get a grasp on the “big story” in the Bible. Using a wonderful series by InterVarsity Press, we will consider “The Old Testament in Seven Sentences” and “The New Testament in Seven Sentences.” This isn’t just a gimmick; the authors lift up seven major themes of each testament and summarize them using a key sentence (from scripture) and the context around it. So often people we treat the Bible as magic book of one-liners or we use it as a kind of higher authority to back up our own point of view. But it is God’s great story and I want to make sure each one of you catch a glimpse of that amazing, sweeping story of which we a part. And if you want to dig in even deeper, one of our 10am Sunday school classes, taught by Jim Hinton, is following the same outline and books, but going deeper than we can in a single sermon. If you’d like to be a part of that, let me know and we’ll get you connected!

Today we start in Genesis with Creation... not just the event of Creation per se, but the start of the story. So here is the first of seven Old Testament sentences. I’ll remind you each week of what we’ve covered.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

The account of creation is not only the beginning of God’s story; it also outlines the whole thing in preview of what is to come. It also answers some of what I call the “Big Questions” of existence. In fact, while people often get caught up in the mechanics of Creation, the greater purpose of those first chapters are not to say HOW the world was created, but WHY the world was created. And that will serve as our outline for today – and really for the rest of the entire Bible that follows.

Genesis offers us four key aspects of God's big story: the setting, the characters, the problem, and the promise of a solution. Or perhaps more memorably, those four aspects of the story answer four key questions which we will look at in turn.

SETTING: Where Are We? (Genesis 1-3)

The first several chapters of Genesis answer the big question, "Where are we?" Not where are we as in Charlotte, NC, but where are we in relation to God, to the universe, to history, to existence itself. We read in Genesis 1-3 that Creation is distinct from God, it comes from God. It's neither "everything is god" or "god is everything." God is God and we are not!

We also read that this Creation is GOOD! Over and over in Genesis 1, God surveys what He has made and declares it good. It is good because God made it. And in its goodness we see something of the goodness and character of God. As Psalm 94 will later declare, "The heavens declare God's righteousness, and all the peoples have seen His glory!" (v.6)

And we read that Creation belongs to God. In our call to worship this morning we heard from Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

Where are we in God's big story? We are in God's good creation, tenants in God's property, and bearers of the light of God's glory – that is, we show something about the one who made us.

And why does that matter? It matters because it will shape our purpose, our ethics, our vision, our hope. And it also frames the setting of the story that is to unfold.

CHARACTERS: Who are We? (Genesis 1-3)

The second big question is "Who are we?" And by that I mean humanity specifically. What does it mean to be human? To be sure, we share some things with all creation. The Bible describes God's love, care, and provision of all that He made. But we also read in Genesis 1:26-28 that humanity – male and female – are unique because we are made *in the image of God*. Last week I mentioned that as the basis for human dignity, in general but as a specific reminder in this time in regards to people of color and the issues freshly before us in our country and community.

There is a two-fold calling upon us as those made BY God and in God's image. First, we are created to RULE over this creation on God's behalf. And so the so-called "cultural mandate" is given in Genesis 1:28 – "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over... every living things that moves on the earth." Of course, we are to do so as representatives of God... to rule as God rules, with love, care, and provision. It's only after "the problem" happens that we really get that all wrong. But we aren't quite there yet.

The second part of our two-fold calling is to SERVE. From the very beginning in the Garden, this was the work given to the humans. To serve the land and to serve the Lord. That concept became the core idea behind worship later in the Bible. We see one holdover of that concept when we refer to worship as a "worship service."

Interesting that our calling is to rule and to serve. Those don't seem to go together, but that's just what God does. I think our difficulty comes in the distorted view of rule that came after sin. But that was not God's intent for us.

And then we are called to do those things TOGETHER... in community. God's creation of woman was the first demonstration of this, as God declared that Adam needed a "helpmeet." They were to pursue the calling of rule/serve together. The community of two was better than one alone. And indeed it was as two – male and female – that they reflected the image of God. God later expanded community to include both the home and the wider family of faith. But in all cases, community becomes a core part of who we are and how we are to live out our purpose or calling in this world.

PROBLEM: What's Gone Wrong? (Genesis 1-3 and 4-11)

The third big question is "What's gone wrong?" And if there is any question in the world that probably doesn't need explanation, it is this one. We can all see that things are not right. There are wars and injustice and inequality and hunger and sickness and more. 2020 has been a veritable vortex of those things. But Genesis digs a little deeper to ask if there is an underlying problem – and there is.

Like the Creation account, the story of the Fall and its consequences are again, not mean to be a history lesson but to be an explanation... not HOW but WHY. In other words, it doesn't matter what the fruit was on the tree or how

snakes could talk. Rather, the story of the Fall describes the human choice to grasp past being made in God's image, to be like gods. And in doing so, our first parents distorted the image of God and turned away from God's best.

Scripture names that choice, that problem, calling it "sin." It continues to manifest in two ways. One is that it is the ultimate pandemic... it's saturated everything including creation itself. A simple way to understand that might be that Adam and Even turned their backs on God and from that point everything they did was impacted by that decision. There was a ripple effect that even touches you and me. But a second manifestation of sin is that we keep making the same choice that they did. We didn't just inherit sin, we repeat it. And so we also rebel against God, reject His best, and turn away.

So it's a really big problem. Sin permeates everything, not just individual, but our collective society and history. And let me explain that a little more. It's not just a spiritual problem between us and God; it has earthly consequences that affect everything from relationships to money to racism to greed to a hundred more things that are twisted and distorted from the goodness that God would desire. So sin is not just a spiritual abstract... it is the problem that wounds us all.

PROMISED SOLUTION: What's the Solution? (Genesis 12)

And all that is the main focus of the first 11 chapters or so of Genesis. It includes the Flood story, with more explanation of evil and the impact of collective sin. But there is the briefest hints of hope in Genesis 3. Though God had said that if Adam and Eve ate of the Tree they would surely die, God showed mercy and spared their life. And in the midst of the curse, the consequences that were yet short of death, God also speaks of a descendant of the woman who would have victory over the serpent. And that's all we get there.

But starting in Genesis 12, we start the story of Abraham. It is his story that starts to unfold the promised solution to the seemingly insurmountable problem of sin. And that's where we will pick up next week with the second sentence for the Old Testament, when God says to Abraham:

All people on earth will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:3)

Amen!