

“From Dust to Destiny”

Genesis 1:1-5, 26-31

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April 25, 2010

A lot of people think the Bible is out of sync with our modern understanding. In some circles, you get laughed at if you say you believe the Bible is true, especially among academia and the media. Maybe one of the biggest reasons for that are the first words of the book of Genesis, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." That flies in the face of a lot of scientism in our times.

In fact, many people think that sentence casts doubt on the rest of the Bible, too. If you believe that, they think, you're backward. They see the Bible as a myth, a way for superstitious people in the past to make sense of the universe. Now we think we know better. Everything that is came into being in a big bang, and through a random evolutionary process.

But you can be a serious student of biology or physics and still believe in what God says in this book. In fact, when you observe the beauty, intricacy, complexity, and order of the world around us, it's a bigger leap of faith to believe it all came into being through chance, than to believe it came into being at the hand of a purposeful creator.

Today we're starting a series on the book of Genesis. The word comes from the Greek translation of the first word of the Hebrew text. It means "beginnings" because the book is about the beginning of creation, of humanity, of sin, of the nations, and of our salvation. It's important for our faith, because if you can't believe what God says about these things, if you toss aside Genesis, you're going to have a hard time believing a lot of what the Bible has to say. Let me share just a few general comments on Genesis, and then see what the passage for this morning has to say to us.

Genesis is divided into two main parts. The first part is the first eleven chapters, and it gives a general history of humanity. The second part tells the story of Israel, from Abraham to the death of Joseph. In the big sweep, the book tells the story of creation, rebellion, and then how God reaches out to save us even when we're running away from him.

There are five great heroes of the book, and this is their story: Adam, in chapters one to three, Noah in chapters four to nine, Abraham, in chapters twelve to twenty-five, Isaac, in chapters twenty-five to thirty-five, and Joseph in chapters thirty-six to fifty.

The author of the book was Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch or the Torah. He compiled the books from oral histories that had circulated in Israel for a long time.

To understand Genesis, it's important to say two things that it is *not*.

1. Genesis is not a science textbook.

Even though it portrays events factually, it presents them in a way that the readers would connect with. It doesn't explain *how* creation came about; it reveals *who* is behind it and what its purpose is.

Don't let the details cloud you from the big picture. Genesis is not a science textbook, but what it says is true, that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Start there, and let God work out the details of the how and when later—but if you miss this, you miss everything.

2. Genesis is not a history book in the usual sense.

Instead, it's an account of certain parts of history, as they have to do with God, and salvation through Abraham's family tree.

Genesis is the story of how God created humanity; how humans ran away from him, then how God began his plan to save them through a people that would bear the Savior. Genesis, then, is God's Story of Salvation.

That's why it doesn't tell us how creation took place. It tells us who made the universe, and why he made it. And it's the foundation for understanding God's plan that unfolds through the rest of the Bible.

It's interesting that the creation of humans is told twice in Genesis—in chapter one, God says "Let there be," and humans spring into being; in chapter two, God scoops some dust, some clay from the earth, and shapes it into a man, then breathes his life into the man, then shapes the woman out of the man's rib. It's not that the writer couldn't see how those couldn't both be literally true at the same time. It's that it's not history in the usual sense. It's not supposed to tell us exactly how, but why and who.

With that in mind, I want to think with you about three things the text does teach us this morning. One is that God created human beings. The second is that God created us in his image. The third is that God created to exercise dominion over the earth.

Did you know it's possible to believe these three truths and not be a Christian? After all, they're all taught right here in the Jewish Scriptures. A faithful Jew would accept these truths. But even though you can believe these three truths and not be a Christian, all of them point to our Christian faith. They all look forward to the completion that comes with the work and Christ.

1. God Created Human Beings.

Let's take the first truth: that God has created human beings. That suggests a question: why did he create us? When you make something, you have a reason for making it. But this world we live in can't provide an adequate answer to that question. The physical world cannot provide an answer to our purpose; that answer needs to come from God. The Old Testament talks about us being created to show forth God's glory (Isaiah 43:7). It talks about the earth being filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. That's the purpose for which we were made, to "glorify God and to enjoy him forever," like a confession of our church says.

But what do we see? We see a world in rebellion against the Creator. We see the Old Testament coming to an end with the hope of glory still to come. So just believing that God created human beings the way the Old Testament teaches that he did makes us long for our created purpose to be fulfilled.

2. God Created Us in His Image.

The second truth is that God created us in his image. This tells us that we are not only created beings, we're creatures with a purpose and a special dignity above all creation. This helps us better understand why we're here. God's making us in his image has to do with a lot of things, like our capacity to make moral choices, or our capacity for creativity, or need for relationship with God, or our identity as male and female, so we're created for relationships with each other. The image of God in us touches on all of this. We are the apex of creation, designed for God, we alone and no other animal.

But what a mess we have made of this awesome dignity. Are we like God? Well, yes and no. Yes, we are like God, even in human sin and unbelief there is a likeness. The image of God has been tarnished, but not erased. Human beings are still in the image of God, still like God in some important ways.

But the fact that we were created in God's image makes us long for a completion—for redemption, transformation, a kind of re-creation. And that is exactly what Jesus brings:

" For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. . . [So] put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 2:10; 4:24).

God created us in his image, but we have messed it up, so much it's hard to see sometimes. Like Paul says,

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:23).

We're waiting for the day when God makes us complete, radiant like Jesus, just like he made us in our original perfection. Jesus is the answer. He comes when we trust him, he forgives, he begins to make us look more like him, and the end product in our lives will be the glory that God intended for human beings in the first place.

3. God created us to show his rule over creation.

Sometimes people say Christianity leads to the exploitation of earth's resources. Actually, the opposite is true—when people live as the Bible teaches it leads to care of the earth. Because the command isn't to use up the earth or simply burn out its resources for selfish use, but to nurture, to care for, to steward the earth responsibly, as agents of God himself, not simply to chew up its resources and spit them out.

Part of what that means is that we nurture the earth for the sake of future generations; God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. That means it's for the benefit of people, of our children's children. Sometimes people have the idea in our world that people are a blight on the planet, and you need to limit future generations for the care of

the earth. That's getting it backwards. We have our place of honor in creation. The world in its beauty and order has value, in the way it reflects God, and in the way it provides for human needs of body and soul. So we need to care for creation, but have our priorities straight, and worship only the Creator.

When we care for the earth in the way God intended, it's a way of showing the world who God is, of getting the attention off us and on God. That's why Paul says,

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:5-6).

That's remarkable—Paul is echoing the language of creation. He's saying we find, and creation itself finds its ultimate purpose in the person of Jesus Christ, the model of our new creation.

So let me sum up what we have seen:

God created human beings.

And as the Old Testament closes, this awesome fact demands the rest of the story to make sense out of what God was up to. His purpose in creation is not finished without the work of Christ.

God created us in his image.

But we have marred the image so badly it is hard to recognize. That's why this truth begs for the completion of Christianity because what Jesus does is reclaim what has been lost. It is called a "new creation in Christ." The image of God is restored in us when we trust Jesus who is righteous and true.

God created us to show his rule over creation.

Therefore think about this—the way God cares for creation is through you, and he cares for his creation that you might fulfill the purpose for which he made you.

Genesis says in the beginning the earth was “formless and void.” Maybe you feel “formless and void” in some way, but God can create form out of void, light out of darkness, order out of chaos. Even as he moved over the face of the waters, if you let him, the Holy Spirit will move over your life, creating and giving purpose to your life.

Maybe you feel pressured by life's hardships, or by relationships, or by the wiles of the devil. Sometimes, we hurt because of our own bad choices. But just like God created the heavens and the earth, he can re-create a new person in you if you'll let him.

Maybe life seems sometimes like nothing but a random process of genetic mutations in an evolutionary process. But it takes more faith to believe that than it does to believe that an intelligent and good designer created the cosmos in all its splendor and order.

Remember, God is the great Creator, and everything he makes is good. It's safe to put your trust in Him. He will take the greatest of care for your life. That's why Jesus said,

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the fullest.” (John 10:10)

That’s good news! It means, like Paul said,

”Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

That means you and me. We were made from the dust of the earth, but we were made for a great destiny in Jesus Christ.