

"In the Beginning"

Genesis 1:1-2:3

Baxter Exum (#1008)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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Four Lakes Church of Christ



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Lessons from my Grandfather:

We are so thankful that you allowed us to be away for my grandfather's funeral last week—Tommy Exum. As we begin this morning, and before we get into God's word, I just wanted to pass along a few lessons that he taught me through the years. **»PPT»** He was born in Texas and served in the Navy during World War II. In fact, I remember him telling me that he had the distinct privilege of protecting the shores of Florida from drunken sailors. Nevertheless, while in the Navy, he used his free time to establish a congregation of the Lord's people down in Key West. He walked from house to house looking for those who were already members of the Lord's church, and he helped them find a place to worship. Someone had connections at the courthouse, and there were twelve people present for the very first service, so they worshiped in the jury box. After the Navy, he went on to work as a salesman—eventually selling steel for Wheeling Steel. He served as a deacon, later as an elder, and at the age of 42 he made the decision to enter full-time work for the church as the Personal Evangelism minister for the Charlotte Avenue congregation in Nashville. After several years doing that, he preached for more than 12 years in Lynchburg, Tennessee. Following that experience, he moved back to Nashville and served as the director of the Great Commission School at the Wingate Church of Christ—a school focused on training people how to study the Bible one-on-one with others. From there he went on to serve as an associate minister for another congregation before retiring several years ago. In all of those years, there are several lessons he taught me that I would like to just briefly pass along:

- For one, he taught me to love reading. On one of our visits down to Nashville about ten years ago, I discovered he had the habit of reading one page out of the dictionary every night. On that particular night, I remember he was in the "s's," and he had discovered the word "**serendipity**." He loved reading and loved passing that along. Nearly every birthday and Christmas, he would get me a book, and it only took a few years before he had given me a Gospel Advocate commentary on every book of the New Testament.
- He also passed along a key lesson on his idea of preaching. Some of his key advice was, "**Never use a big word when a smaller word will get the point across.**" And the idea is: If you use a big word, you might lose half the audience, but if you use a smaller word you allow everyone to keep up, because even really smart people can also understand the small words. So, by using a big word to make yourself look smart, you are actually worse at communicating and are not being very smart!

- I have shared this several times here, but he also had a pretty good way of looking at trouble in the church. He would always say, **“The church is a perfect organization made up of imperfect people.”** He did not want me to get disillusioned and overwhelmed with whatever issues might be disturbing the Lord’s church at any particular moment.
- And finally, one of the most helpful pieces of advice is something that he would often repeat at the end of his letters. He would always say (in all capital letters), **“KEEP CALM.”** And he was saying that a gospel preacher should always KEEP CALM. It does no good to lose your temper or fly off the handle at something, but it is always better to KEEP CALM—probably pretty good advice for all of us!

These are just a few of the memories I have, and I wanted to pass it along so you can appreciate him at least to a tiny extent that I did.

Introduction:

This morning, in response to a request from one of the young people of this congregation, I would like for us to look together at the opening chapter of the entire Bible. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found starting on **page 1**, **»PPT»** and the passage starts with the well-known words, **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”** Certainly most people in the world around us have been taught from childhood all the way up through the highest levels of graduate school that the Universe is billions of years old and that life on earth sprang up from non-living matter and very slowly evolved over a period of millions upon millions of years.

And so as we look at **Genesis 1**, many people have the preconceived idea that the entire chapter is nothing but a legend—a story for little children, a primitive myth with no real meaning for the world today, a man-made fable that has no chance of standing up to modern science, or perhaps even an embarrassing story because of what we have now learned about evolution in school. Trusting in God, though, we believe what He tells us in Scripture, including what we read in **Genesis 1** because, **“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God...”** (**Hebrews 11:3**, ESV).

This morning, then, I would like for us to look together at the opening chapter of the Bible, and I would like for us to come to the understanding that this is a relevant part of the Bible—and not only relevant, but it is crucial for understanding who God is and what He has done. I say that the opening chapters of **Genesis** are crucial, because there are over 200 references to **Genesis** in the New Testament, and over 100 of these are from **Genesis 1-11**, so it appears that the inspired writers had the utmost respect for the opening chapters of the book of **Genesis**. In fact, each of these eleven chapters is quoted or alluded to somewhere in the New Testament, and every New Testament writer refers to this section of **Genesis**. Even Jesus Himself referred to each of the first seven chapters on at least six different occasions, as recorded in all four gospel accounts. What I’m saying is that neither Jesus nor any New Testament writer give even the slightest hint that the first eleven chapters in **Genesis** are anything other than pure history (Gary Workman, *Genesis: Are the First*

Eleven Chapters Historical?; Spiritual Sword, n.d.). With that in mind, let us please look together at **Genesis 1:1-2:3**...

- 1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.***
- 2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.***
- 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.***
- 4 God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.***
- 5 God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.***
- 6 Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."***
- 7 God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so.***
- 8 God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.***
- 9 Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so.***
- 10 God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good.***
- 11 Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them"; and it was so.***
- 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good.***
- 13 There was evening and there was morning, a third day.***
- 14 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years;***
- 15 and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so.***
- 16 God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also.***
- 17 God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth,***
- 18 and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good.***
- 19 There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.***
- 20 Then God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens."***

- ²¹ *God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good.*
- ²² *God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."*
- ²³ *There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.*
- ²⁴ *Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so.*
- ²⁵ *God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.*
- ²⁶ *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*
- ²⁷ *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*
- ²⁸ *God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*
- ²⁹ *Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you;*
- ³⁰ *and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so.*
- ³¹ *God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*
- ¹ *Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts.*
- ² *By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.*
- ³ *Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.*

As we look back over what we have just read, I would like for us to notice four brief lessons about God.

I. **Way back up in verse 1, one of the first things notice is that GOD IS ETERNAL. ▶PPT▶**

In other words, God was in existence before the creation of the world. I appreciate the way Moses put it in Psalm 90:2, *"Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."*

And, as God Himself said in **Isaiah 43:10**, ***"Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me."*** And as He went on to say in **Isaiah 44:6**, ***"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.'"*** Perhaps only when this life is over will we fully understand what God said to Moses in **Exodus 3:14**, when He said, ***"I AM WHO I AM."*** As God's creation, we have the opportunity to worship the One who was here before the world was created. God has always existed, and He will always exist. God is eternal.

Before the creation of the world, we find that God was rather busy. Over in **1 Peter 1**, for example, we discover that we were redeemed at the proper time, ***"...with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times...."*** Even before the foundation of the world, then, God was making plans for our redemption. Even before the creation of the world, God was making plans for the sacrifice of His only Son. The sacrifice of Christ was ***"foreknown before the foundation of the world."***

In **Ephesians 3**, we find that God was also making plans for the church. Starting in **verse 9** of **Ephesians 3**, Paul referred to, ***"...the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** And so the church was established in accordance with God's ***"eternal purpose."***

Not only that, but we discover in **Matthew 25:34** that God was also planning our eternal reward, ***"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"*** And so we discover first of all this morning that God is eternal.

II. There is something else we learn about God from Genesis 1, and that is, GOD IS OUR ALL-POWERFUL AND LOVING CREATOR. »PPT»

As we look at the whole account, we find that God creates an entire Universe for the express benefit of the human race. And we notice after almost everything God makes, He declares that it is ***"good,"*** and the whole thing is, ***"very good."*** Everything He creates is done for our benefit.

He gave us lights in the sky to divide night from day and to keep track of time, and seasons, and years. He gave us air to breathe and water to drink. He placed the earth itself in the perfect position—roughly 93 million miles away from the sun. Any closer and we would be burned to a crisp. Any farther and we would be frozen. Thanks to the 24 hour rotation, nearly everywhere on earth receives at least a few hours of sunlight and a few hours of darkness every day. Almost nowhere gets too hot or too cold for humans to survive in some way. The earth itself travels in an orbit

around the sun—traveling through space at around 60,000 MPH and deviating from a straight line by only 1/9th of an inch every 18 miles. If it departed by 1/8th of an inch we would be incinerated. If it departed by 1/10th of an inch we would all freeze to death in an instant. But not only did God prepare a planet that would keep us safe, He also made it interesting. He tilted the earth at exactly 23½°, and so He gave us seasons. We can go swimming in the summer and sledding in the winter. The north gets cold while the south gets warm, and then vice versa, and those temperature variations give us weather, and the weather regulates temperature as warm fronts and cold fronts move through each area. We have wind and currents in the sea. Moisture evaporates over one area and gets dropped as rain or snow over other areas. Moisture is moved around.

And then on top of all of this, the good Lord gave us all kinds of food—amazing in its variety. On Day #3, the Lord gave us plants bearing seeds. Some seeds are contained in pods, others come in the middle of a delicious fruit, others are designed to take flight over long distances, and others are designed to attach like Velcro to the legs of animals as they walk by—to be deposited miles away from where they began. It was essential for these plants to survive, because these plants (including their leaves, seeds, roots and bark) would all be needed later to provide food and medicine and clothing and energy. We understand what Paul said in **Acts 14:17**, that God, ***“...did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”*** God is our good and loving Creator!

He gave us these things even before the first man was ever made. On Day #5, He gave us the hummingbird weighing less than an ounce, and He gave us the great blue whale weighing in at more than 390,000 pounds—longer and heavier than a Boeing 737!

On Day #6, He gave us all kinds of creatures that move on the earth—cattle and all kinds of creeping things. I am told that there are over 800,000 different kinds of insects. I have read that if you could put every human being on a giant scale and put every insect on the other side of the scale, the insects would out-weigh the humans by eleven to one! He created all kinds of reptiles, amphibians, and mammals, and he made it so that each one would reproduce ***“after its kind.”*** Aren't you glad that an elephant cannot mate with a butterfly! We can only imagine the disaster! But the point is: God uniquely prepared the earth for our arrival at the end of Day #6. By the time we got here, everything was already in place.

Genesis 1 actually reminds me of parents preparing a nursery for their first-born child. They go out and get the nicest crib and put it together and decorate the room with all of the right colors—stuffed animals and a changing table—everything is perfect. In a similar way, God was preparing a place for all of us here this morning, ***“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*** God is our all-powerful and loving Creator.

III. There is a third basic lesson we learn about God from Genesis 1, and that is, we have at least some concept of the TRINITY. »PPT»

The word “trinity” is never used in the Bible, but the concept is definitely there. In fact, it is here the very first chapter, because in verse 1 the word *ELOHIM* (the word for God) is plural. However, it is used in a singular way as the verb “*created*” that goes with it is singular. Normally, the subject and the verb in a sentence must agree in number. Perhaps it would be a little bit like someone saying, “**We am going to the store.**” We hear that, and we know something is unusual about that sentence. Well, the plurality of *ELOHIM* is rather unusual. We know there are not multiple Gods, though, because the word is used as if there were only one.

The concept of the Trinity is explained in much greater detail in the New Testament, but for now if we keep reading, we see something interesting in verse 2—we read that the “*Spirit of God*” was moving over the surface of the waters. So right there we have God the Spirit. And then in verse 3, God *spoke*. Right there we have the *Word of God*. And again, going back to John 1:1, we remember that Jesus was described as being the “*Word*.” Several years ago, one of our men led a prayer in worship, and he accidentally referred to the fact that we had assembled that morning to worship the Word. He corrected himself, but his statement was actually correct—we do come together every Sunday morning to worship the Word of God—Jesus is the Word! In verse 3 of that passage from John 1, John goes on to say, “***All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.***” And then, over in Colossians 1:16, the apostle Paul identifies Jesus as he says, “***For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.***” And finally, the writer of Hebrews lets us in on something very similar as he says that God, “***...in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.***” Jesus and the Spirit, then, were also present at the creation and played a pretty big role in it. Jesus was the Creator, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water.

But going back to Genesis 1, we learn even more down in verse 26 as God said, “***Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.***” And again, it is rather obvious that God is having a conversation with Himself. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all present at the creation. They are not fully identified until the New Testament (in Matthew 28:19), but we do learn a lesson about the Trinity as God reveals the concept (at least in a very limited way) in the very first chapter of the Bible.

IV. As we close our thoughts on this chapter, there is at least one other lesson on God we can learn, and that is: GOD IS RELATIONAL. »PPT»

In other words, God’s purpose in creating man was to establish a relationship. We find in verse 26 that we were made in the image of God. We were created to be like God in some way. Out of everything that had already been created, we were

different. As humans, we are spiritual, moral, and intelligent. We are the crown, we are the centerpiece, we are at the very top of God's creation.

As Paul said to the Athenian philosophers in **Acts 17**, God made the world and all things in it, and He made mankind, so ***"that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist...."*** We were created with the ability to reach out to God. We were created with that purpose. As Jesus said, the greatest commandment is that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (**Mark 12:30**). Our purpose in this life is to love God. God is looking for a relationship.

Conclusion:

As we think about what this means for us this morning, as we look at **Genesis 1** and ask ourselves the question, **"So what?"** I would like for us to close by looking at a statement made by the Creator in the New Testament. In **Matthew 6**, Jesus sat on a hill He had made, He looked around at the world he had created, and this is what He said...

- ²⁵ ***"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"***
- ²⁶ ***"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?"***
- ²⁷ ***"And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?"***
- ²⁸ ***"And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,***
- ²⁹ ***yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.***
- ³⁰ ***"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!"***
- ³¹ ***"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'"***
- ³² ***"For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.***
- ³³ ***"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.***

We are to seek first the kingdom of God.

This morning if you know that these words are true, we would invite you to respond. Whether we are Christians or not, all of us can respond in some way. For those of us

who are Christians, perhaps we need the prayers and encouragement of the church to get back on track—as a reminder that God’s way is the best way—as a reminder that this world is not all that there is—as a reminder that God will reward the choices we make.

Perhaps your life is chaotic right now—work is not going well, family struggles, illness, sin—all of these things can be taken to God in prayer. The Spirit of God who hovered over the surface of the waters can continue to bring order out of chaos even today.

But if you are not yet a Christian, the Bible teaches that sin (on our part) broke off our relationship with God. And yet almost incredibly, God provided a way back. As we sometimes sing, the way back was provided, **“When Christ the mighty Maker died for man, the creature’s sin.”** We accept that sacrifice by turning away from sin and back to God and by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, we would be glad to study God’s word with you, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right away, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org