

Sermon Title: THE BEGINNING OF LIFE (Jesus In The Law)

Sermon Text: Genesis 1

Date: January 12, 2016 (New Beginnings Baptist)

Intro

It was the Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon, who once said: “Leave Christ out? O my brethren, better leave the pulpit out altogether. If a man can preach one sermon without mentioning Christ’s name in it, it ought to be his last, certainly the last that any Christian ought to go to hear him preach”

When the Prince of Preachers says somethings, us regular preachers generally sit up and listen. So, as I said on Sunday, what I plan to do this week is preach Christ, and specifically preach Christ from the Old Testament. But as I also noted on Sunday the Old Testament is a large body of work, 2/3^{ds} of the whole Bible. That provides a bit of a challenge for me, as I only have three more sessions with y’all and there are 66 books, 929 chapters, and over 23, 000 verses to choose from. So what I have decided is to preach Christ from each of the three sections of the Old Testament as mentioned by Jesus in Luke 24, the chapter where we began on Sunday. Our arrangement of the Old Testament has the historical books grouped together, then the poetic books, then the prophets, first the major (i.e. the longer ones) then the minor (the shorter ones). But the Bible of Jesus, the arrangement He and the other Jews of His day used, was slightly different. I already mentioned that it was arranged into 24 books. Like ours it was also arranged based on the type of writing, but they drew the lines differently than we did. They had three sections:

1. *Torah* (law): Five books of Moses.
2. *Nevi'im* (prophets): Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and "The Twelve" (Minor Prophets).
3. *Ketuvim* (writings): Psalms, Proverbs, and Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

There is evidence of this three-fold division affirmed by Jesus in Luke 24 at the end of the chapter when he says that Jesus taught His disciples about

“everything written about [Himself] in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms”
(Luke 24:44).

There he mentions the *Torah* (the law), the *Nevi'im* (the prophets) and finally instead of mentioning the writings, he mentions the Psalms, this likely being an example of synecdoche, where a person mentions a part to refer to the whole. And it makes sense that Jesus would use the largest part of the *Ketuvim* to refer to the whole thing. All that said, what I intend to do is to preach from each of these three sections, and today we will start in the Torah, and the portion of text I have chosen is the logical place to start in the Old Testament, the beginning.

Text: Genesis 1

1. God Is... (v.1a)

a. There Was a Beginning

Have you ever noticed how most stories begin, with four familiar words: “Once upon a time?” Have you ever thought about what that statement assumes, namely, that there is time? You may have heard a preacher before who said that the first few words of Genesis are like God’s “once upon a time,” but if you stop and think about it, they can’t be, for time had not thus far existed, and without time there can be no beginning or no “once upon a time,” as it were. But, the first three words of Genesis, “*In the beginning*” which consequently translates one word in the Hebrew, the language which this book was originally written in, tells us that there was a beginning. And this beginning is not just the beginning of a story, but it is the beginning of every story, for it is the beginning of all world history. You see, Genesis is not only the account of the creation of stuff, but also the creation of time, which tells us something very important about God, namely that He is not constrained by time, nor does He operate solely based on linear time. God is outside of time, He is beyond time, and He is above time. What this means first is that His existence is not governed by time, for both in the Old Testament (**Deut 33:27; Psalm 90:2**) and in the New Testament (**1 Tim 1:17; Heb 9:14; Rom 1:20; 1 Pet 5:10**) we learn that God is eternal, which is to say that He had no beginning and He has no end. This is not a communicable attribute of God (i.e. one that He shares with men), or not fully anyway. Yes, those of us who through repentance and faith are God’s children are promised eternal life (**John 3:16**), but this is to say that our lives will not end, not that our lives had no beginning because they did. God alone did not have a beginning, and thus He alone is eternal, and thus He must have created time. When unbelievers and skeptics hear that Christians believe that before the world was created that God existed, they then want to know who created God. Well that is an easy one, for no one created God for God is not created. In philosophical terms, it is most accurate to say that every created thing has a beginning. But God is clearly not a created thing, so He does not have to have a beginning, which is a good thing ... because He doesn’t. As Isaiah says:

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite” (Isaiah 57:15).

God “*inhabits eternity*,” which is to say that He has existed, and will exist forever, not confined or limited by time in any way. Now this is not to say that God does not operate and act within linear time, for of course He does, a fact which is clearly proven by the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection, but the point of this is that we must recognize that God is outside of, above, and beyond time, for here we learn that God created time. If He did not, Moses (i.e. the author of Genesis) could not have written “*in the beginning*” for there would not have been a beginning. But as we have it, at the opening of God’s Word we read in the beginning, not once upon a time. I suppose if you like, you could say this is God’s “once upon *the beginning of time*.”

b. God's Existence is Assumed Not Explained

So, the first thing we are given in the first sentence of the Bible is a time marker, but here at the second word (in Hebrew), the first subject in the first sentence of Scripture we find confirmation of who the main character of God's story is, and it is not you, and it is not me ... it is God.

Moses writes "*In the beginning God...*" God is the main character in history, in the Bible, and in the first chapter of Genesis. This is a fact that the author of Genesis does not want us to miss, just count how many times God is mentioned in these 31 verses? I will save you the time and tell you it is 32 times God is mentioned in these 31 verses because this chapter, and consequently every other chapter in the Bible, is first and foremost about God. But not only is it significant that God is mentioned in the first sentence of the Bible, but it is also interesting to note that there is no explanation of God's existence in the opening chapters of the Bible, or even in the rest of the Bible, rather His existence is simply assumed. There are no arguments for the existence of God in Scripture, for none are needed because according to the apostle Paul, every man, woman, and child ever born knows there is a God.

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19-20).

So, it is just stated as fact, with no explanation: God exists. Moses is not compelled to explain God's existence, but rather he writes with two basic presuppositions, first that God exists and second that God reveals Himself, or as famous philosopher and theologian Francis Schaeffer said about God in the title of one of his books: "He is There and He is Not Silent." These are the two most basic presuppositions which if we ignore or suppress (**Rom 1:18**) we will end up with a worldview which is at odds with God's Word and thus at odds with reality. So, in just two words (in the Hebrew) we already find a wealth of information about God, first that He is eternal, and second that He is. But if you were to pick up a Bible for the first time and knew nothing of this book or the God revealed in it and you read "*in the beginning God,*" the most logical question would be: Who is this God? For the answer to that you would need to keep reading, but you would first want to look closer at the word, "*God.*" There are different words used for God throughout the Bible, but here in the opening chapter of the Bible there is only one: Elohim, and as mentioned it shows up 32 times. Now the lexicon tells us that this is a word that can be used as somewhat of a generic term to refer to a god or gods, any gods really (**Deut 32:17; 2 Chron 32:15; Dan 11:39**). So, often it is used along with a qualifier, like for example "*the gods of the Amorites*" (**Josh 24:15**), "*the gods of Edom*" (**2 Chron 25:20**), or "*the God of Israel*" (**Exodus 5:1**). But here the word God is used with no qualifiers, and being that it is the first mention in all the Bible of God, this surely is an indication that there is only one true God, a truth later confirmed by God Himself in **Isaiah 46:9**, as he states: "*I am God and there is none other*". Now concerning who this God is (i.e. His identity), there is no explicit statement in these opening chapters of Genesis, except that there is only one God. But when we consider the rest of

Scripture we find out that the one true God is in fact the Trinitarian God, God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just consider a few verses with me:

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:9-11).

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

So, while I would love to preach an entire sermon on the doctrine of the Trinity this morning, it will suffice to say that the God who exists eternally, and whose existence is assumed from the first verse of the Bible is the Triune God, One God in three persons, and all three of those persons working in perfect unity were involved in the creation.

2. God Is Creator (v. 1b)

So the opening words of the Bible are that God is, but the opening sentence of the Bible is that God is creator, for we read *“God created the heavens and the earth.”* So we know that God exists, but here we find the first thing that He reveals to us about what He does, namely, that He creates. He is the Creator God, for He was there in the beginning when there was nothing else, and He brought into existence everything: all time, all space, all matter and all life. This is a subject which has been the cause of much discussion and debate in the public square today: Where did the universe come from? And while evolution is no recent theory, the question of evolution versus creation has taken center stage within both pop-culture and academia, no doubt a result of the quest that the four horsemen of the New Atheism (Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennet and Christopher Hitchens) have been on. The question of origins has become so hot a topic that a recent debate on the subject between Bill Nye the evolutionist and creationist Ken Ham has garnered over 5 million YouTube views. Now sadly when someone claims to be a creationist (i.e. someone who believes that God created all things) they are accused of simple-minded, backwoods, anti-science thinking. But I assure you that the conclusion that God created the universe is not only in accord with Scripture, but is also the result of good, sound, scientific logic. Three simple questions will demonstrate this: (1) When you see a **building** what is the most basic assumption that you have about that building? That someone built it. (2) When you see a **painting** what is the most basic presupposition that you have concerning that painting? That an artist painted it. (3) So then when you look around at the world (i.e. creation), what is the most basic assumption that you have concerning the creation? That someone created it. Now that is good sound logic, and as it stands it is in perfect accord with what God has revealed to us about Himself that He is the Creator God. In the beginning there was nothing except God, and He created ...all things. The Triune God created all things, a truth hinted at in the opening verses

of Genesis. We have God the Father, for we read *“in the beginning God,”* but then in verse two we find *“the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”* (**Gen 1:2b**), and finally we have the Son, or as John refers to Him, *“the Word”* (**John 1:1**). The fact that God created all things, is yet another truth in the opening words of the Bible that Isaiah confirms when he says:

“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself” (**Isa 44:24**).

From the pen of the prophet, but breathed out by God: everything that was made, He made it. But there are at least three things I would like us to see about how God creates which will teach us about God. But instead of going through the rest of this chapter verse by verse, which could take some time, it will suit our purposes better today to note the repetition in these opening verses of the creation account, and learn from that.

a. God’s Power (vv. 2-31)

As we look through the chapter, the first thing we see is that God is a God of power. God began by creating the material universe, and we find out several times how God created: by His Word. In other words He spoke and it happened. Seven times in Genesis 1 we find the phrase *“And God said”*:

1. *“And God said let there be light”* (**Gen 1:3**)
2. *“And God said let there be an expanse”* (**Gen 1:6**)
3. *“And God said let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place”* (**Gen 1:9**)
4. *“And God said let the earth sprout vegetation”* (**Gen 1:11**)
5. *“And God said let there be lights in the expanse”* (**Gen 1:14**)
6. *“And God said let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth”* (**Gen 1:20**)
7. *“And God said let the earth bring forth living creatures”* (**Gen 1:24**).

And after each of those phrases there is an accompanying phrase, sometimes altered specifically to the first phrase, but essentially every time God says something, we then read: *“And it was so”* (**Gen 1:7, 1:9, 1:11, 1:15, 1:24**). The point being here that God speaks and the universe comes into existence. God says let there be light and there is light (**Gen 1:3**), God says let the sea and the sky be full of fish and birds, and it was done (**Gen 1:21**). The author of Hebrews summarizes God’s power in creation by noting how foundational this is to our faith:

“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (**Heb 11:3**).

God’s power is infinite, for at once there was nothing and He speaks and there is everything.

b. God’s Order

Now, you will remember that in the beginning God created the universe, that is, the heavens and the earth, space and matter. But if you look at verse 2 again, we find out what state God’s creation was in: *“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep”* (**2a**). So, pretty much what you have at this point is water and darkness. What follows next is the account of the six days of creation, yet these six days are further divided into two sets of

three, and each of the days in the first set of three correspond with a day in the second set of three.

1. On day one God creates light while on day four He creates that which governs the light (i.e. sun, moon and stars).
2. On day two God creates the expanse and divided the sky from the water, while on day five God creates birds and fish to fill the sky and the water.
3. On day 3 God creates land and vegetation and on day 6 He creates animals and humans to inhabit the land.

We see here that God is not a God of chaos; He is a God of order. He does not throw this world together in a whim but rather puts it together in an orderly, logical fashion. He had a plan and a purpose and He followed that plan perfectly. Now there are a few things we can point out here, first that for the first three days there was light but there was no sun, moon or stars, yet this is not a problem to be solved, for in the New Heavens and New Earth its inhabitants will have light without a sun or moon, for *“God will be their light”* (**Rev 22:5**). Second, while some of you may have heard messages on the first chapter of Genesis which included long polemics against the many theories of the timing of creation, I see no need for that, not today anyway, for after every day of the six days of creation we read: *“there was evening and there was morning”* (**Gen 1:5, 1:8, 1:13, 1:19, 1:23, 1:31**). Sure, I could outline for you a lengthy discourse on the study of the Hebrew word for day (i.e. *yom*), but that is hardly necessary? There was evening and there was morning each day. I don’t know any other way to read it, but that God created in six, orderly, 24 hour days. So, from the repetition in the first chapter of the Bible we see God’s power in creation and God’s order in creation, finally we must see God’s goodness in creation.

3. God Is Good (vv. 2-31)

Six times throughout the six days of creation after we learn about different elements of God’s creating power we see this refrain: *“And God saw that it was good”* (**Gen 1:4, 1:10, 1:12, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25**). Now just before we carry on, we need to be sure we understand what it means when God says something is good. When you and I say something is good we use it in relation to our preferences. So if you like something (that you ate or watched or experienced, etc) you say it is good. Well, I suppose that we can say it is slightly similar with God, for if He likes something or is pleased with it, He says it is good. Now this is all well and good, except there is one thing that we must recognize, and it is that when we determine whether something is good or not it is according to our standard or definition of good, which is obviously flawed, for there is not a human being who is good (**Rom 3:10-12**). Thus our judgement concerning what is good is nothing more than a reflection of our petty preferences. But with God it is different because He is truly good, as the Psalmist writes:

“For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations” (**Psalms 100:5**).

Thus God is really the only one who can say whether something is truly good or not, because He alone knows what is good, because He alone is good. Furthermore, since God alone is good, and God alone knows what is good, God alone does what is good. So, six times throughout the six days God looks at what He has done and says *“it was good,”* but as the week of creation is coming to a close, and God finishes His work of creation, He says something which hammers home this point concerning His supreme goodness: *“And God saw everything that he had made,*

and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day” (Gen 1:31).

Conclusion

Now surely there is much more which could be said about this masterpiece of a chapter which Moses penned, and there are all manner of discussions which could be had concerning specific elements of the creation account. For goodness sake, there are international organizations (i.e. CMA, AIG, etc) which are committed to discussing and defending just what is taught in this one chapter of the Bible. But today we have learned that (1) God is and that He depends on no one or no thing for His existence; (2) God is creator and as such is orderly and powerful; (3) God is good, which is to say morally perfect and truly good. So where does this leave us? Well let’s go back through those three points ... except let’s do it in reverse order.

a. God Is Good ... We Are Not

God is good, and His creation was very good, but as we all know something went wrong so that the earth is groaning and every man, woman and child is born a sinner. The event I refer to is what theologians call the fall (see **Genesis 3**), and it when the first man determined that he would be the Lord of his own life. Adam’s sin and disobedience then resulted in death, but not just for him and Eve but for their descendants who would all be born, totally depraved sinners (**Rom 5:12**). In other words, while God is good, man is not, and if left in his state of rebellion against God will face death, judgement and hell. We then need someone who is good, and will be perfectly good so that person can be an appropriate sacrifice for us. That person is Jesus, the One who has existed as the second person of the Trinity for all eternity. John, in his vision of the end times, saw Jesus and heard Him declare:

“I am the Alpha and Omega who is who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (John 1:3).

We just celebrated Christmas, the time when Christians focus on the birth of Christ, and sadly many people think that that is the time when Jesus came into existence: his birth. But He didn’t, Jesus has always existed as Paul confirms:

“And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

This is what makes the incarnation just so miraculous and amazing, that the eternal Son of God took on flesh and became fully man while remaining fully God. He was born of a virgin and as the author of Hebrews tells us, *“has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15)*. He lived the perfectly good life that we should have lived, and He *“died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6)* the death that we should have died. It is on the cross that we see the most stunning statement concerning the goodness of God. We are ungodly, we are bad, but Jesus is *“the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11)*.

b. God Is Orderly...We Are A Mess

But the cross was not where it ended, for though we are chaotic and our lives are chaotic, God is orderly, perfect and powerful in making and carrying out His plan. We might think we are in control of our lives, but we are not. We need someone who can make something out of the mess that our lives are. We need someone who can take a broken, rebellious pot and turn it into a *“vessel for honorable use” (Rom 9:21)*. We need someone who can take a heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh (**Ezek 36:26**). We need someone who can, and did, break out of the grave alive and well, having conquered death and hell *“for our justification” (Rom 4:25)* so that we may have *“life” (John 3:16)*... and that we may have it *“abundantly” (John 10:10)*. We

need the one who carried out God's perfect plan, the one who became sin for us so that in Him we become the righteousness of God (**2 Cor 5:20-21**). We need the one through whom we can be made a new creation (**2 Cor 5:17**). We need the Lord Jesus.

c. God Is Self-Existent ... We Are Not

We cannot save ourselves. We might think we can do it on our own. We might think we will be ok, if like Sinatra, we do it our way. We might think we are self-made men and women. But we are not. We were created by God and we are wholly and dependent on Him. We did not create ourselves; we were created by the Triune God, and thus are dependent on Him, which is why Paul can say:

“For by [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him”
(**Colossians 1:16**).

We might think that we have a plan and purpose for our lives, and that we have the power to carry it out. But we do not. On our own, we will fail, and our lives will be absolutely useless ending in destruction. But there is one who knows us better than we know ourselves, for through Him we were made and through Him we can be remade. As John said:

“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made”
(**John 1:3**).

Jesus is the beginning of life. Jesus is the “*author of life*” (**Acts 3:15**). Jesus is the giver of eternal life (**John 3:16**) and God commands all people everyone everywhere to repent (**Acts 17:30**). So if you want eternal life you must “*confess you're your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead*” (**Rom 10:9**). Then and only then will you be saved. Do not trust in yourself. Do not follow your heart. Instead listen to Jesus, the self-existent, eternal, Good Shepherd who said: “*Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me*” (**John 14:1**). Without Jesus there is only despair and death, but with Jesus there is life because Jesus is the beginning of life.