

SERMON: "BIBLE BASICS - CREATION"

TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT GENESIS 1:1-5, 24-31
OLD TESTAMENT GENESIS 2:1-9, 14-25

June 30, 2024

Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

Three professionals were having a friendly argument about whose profession was the oldest. The doctor started the conversation by saying, "Physicians were the first. In the beginning God created man and woman. Needed someone to care for them, for the human body.

The engineer jumped in with a correction. "Nice of you to start 'in the beginning.' But if you knew your bible better, you'd know that the creation story begins in some versions with, "In the beginning, there was chaos, a watery void and God brought forth order out of chaos. Engineers were the first professionals, someone to help bring order to the chaos."

The lawyer just chuckled and said so as to end the argument, "Where do you think the chaos came from in the first place? Lawyers came first."

Today we begin a new series of sermons by talking about creation
We'll begin with an admission of what we don't know – that chaos
Then order it a bit to see (and welcome) the tension that the bible
gives us two creation stories – not one, but two

Then, from there, see if we can find one thing that might be foundational for our understanding of the world and of God's place as our Creator. Actually, let me start there with talk of foundations.

We see the bible as foundational for our faith, but what do we mean by that?
I was maybe 16 or 17, thought it would be good to read the bible
Started 'in the beginning' like I would any other book
Didn't make it that far. Got lost in the 'begats' and hard to pronounce names

Any of you experience that yourself? Started reading the bible and got a little lost or overwhelmed? It can happen when you're 16 and when you are 60
This sermon series is an attempt to help you with that.
We're going to take a big picture look at the bible
We want to see both the trees ... and the forest

OUTLINE & ORIGIN

Our normal pattern on Sunday morning is to focus on one or two passages
Do some analysis, take a deeper dive into a particular passage
We're trying something different with this series – synthesis, seeing how things connect, focusing on the pattern more than the passage

This sermon series on “Bible Basics” is meant to serve as an outline
An outline that will help you see the key themes, the turning points in the story
We want you to see the forest so you might also appreciate the trees
The reasoning being that in so doing we might avoid getting lost in the ‘begats,’ missing the major movements and messages. Or worse, majoring in the minors

I love God's word, deeply. I am so very tired of seeing it used and abused
People treating it like a search engine, looking up a passage to prove a point using it to prove how right I am and how wrong you are, using it as a weapon.
Tired of people saying “the bible says” when their emphasis is on something it might say once or twice, but doesn't really seem to emphasize all that much

And I'm tired of people politely agreeing that the bible is foundational, important and at the same time not really knowing what it is says over and over what the major story lines are in the biblical story, in the greatest story ever told
So yes, to combat my own grumpiness my purpose with this series is to stop my complaining ... and instead do some explaining

This morning we begin with roman numeral one in the outline – creation
It is first in our outline not because it is the major thrust of the story
We will get to that later in the telling of the story (think Jesus here)
We begin in the beginning with creation because a good story needs a good beginning ... in this case, an origin story

Many faith traditions include creation stories.
Religious traditions and texts, in many ways, especially before the Enlightenment and our modern scientific worldview, were the primary ways in which people asked and answered life's basic questions of what, why and how

People have always been curious, have always looked to understand
Over time most efforts to understand creation fit into three schools of thought
The three need not be seen as mutually exclusive. They can be mixed.
As your pastor, I encourage that both/and kind of mixing and thinking in general and in particular when you think about creation

STORIES OF CREATION

One, the world came into being organically, a process of evolution, of growth
maybe started with a big bang, some kind of catastrophic yet creative cosmic event
This view may or may not include some kind of divine intent
It is a scientific view that can coexist, and need not compete with,
a religious understanding of creation as the work of the Divine

Two, the world came into being quite intentionally - a creation and a Creator
This religious view, at its best, humbly holds that the most important thing for us
to know about creation is not so much the 'how' or 'how long' ... but the 'who'
This religious view holds that creation is God's doing, a gift given in love

This religious worldview is shared by the three faiths that claim Abraham and Sarah
as our ancestors in the faith – Judaism, Christianity and Islam
The story in Islam, in the Quran, is slightly different in just a few places

Three, a view held with humility by many Buddhists is that the beginning of this world
and human life is inconceivable since they have no beginning or end.
Bertrand Russell said it this way, *“there is no reason to suppose that the world
had a beginning at all. The idea that things must have a beginning is really
due to the poverty of our thoughts.”*

I rather like how the third school of thought embraces the mystery of it all
I like the humility. That said, I believe we can have (and are called to have)
a sense of humility and mystery by holding all three views together
with the second – that creation is a gift given in love by our Creator
holding the scientific curiosity of the first and the humility of the third together

So the bible basics about creation. We start with a mix from the get-go – both/and
Here is how the creation stories (*Yes there are two of them*) are told.
First in Genesis, chapter one

**In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth
was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a
wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let
there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good ...**

First off, it starts with God. God is the one doing the creating
Starting from scratch, the Creator begins first with a wind
(which in Hebrew is the same word as Spirit and as breath)
That language about wind / spirit / breath will also be used in the second story.
It is good to look for common threads and themes in bible study

IT'S GOOD!

That being said, look at what gets said time and again in Genesis 1,

“And God saw that it was good ...” That turn of phrase is repeated multiple times through each day of creation. We find it in verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25 and after God creates humankind “very good” in verse 31

Don't you think that is said so often so as to make a point?

Yes, a preacher and teacher can focus on so many things in the creation stories
Some really want to treat these verses as a science textbook
and insist this was all done in 6 24 hour days.

I don't think that's the point. I think the point is what is repeated so many times

Two points actually – One is that God is the one doing the creating
Doing so with stage direction, verbal cues and that wind / Spirit / breath
and the second point, the one repeated 7 times ... “And it was good!”

I admit I feel like raising my hands when I say that, like in football. “It's good!”

It does kind of get the point across, doesn't it? Thinking that way,
I could summarize these two main points the same way, making the same gesture
And saying very similar things. First point, pointing up, “It's God's
And the second point also pointing up, “It's good!”

Yes, there are other points to point to in these creation stories plural

That God created humankind and then gave us a job to do – to be gardeners
to care for this good creation. I've preached that sermon and will again another time
That we are created in the image of God. That is worthy of several sermons,
Sunday school lessons and supportive words to someone doubting their worth

Another good point is one Johnny shared when we did our “Text and Context” session
talking about what the bible does and does not say about human sexuality

The first passages we looked at were the creation stories and the language of
creation in pairs – night and day, sky and earth, water and land, etc

He made the really good point that these are not a strict binary – either/or

Night dawns into day, Day becomes dusk before dark
Water and land come together sometimes with waves crashing against rock
Other times wetlands, saltwater gradually giving way to fresh as you come
up river to right about where my mom, Annie, grew up on the Pamlico in NC

That fits with how so many of us have fit together two creation stories

One has man and woman created at the same time. The second has
man created first out of dirt and wind / Spirit / breath ... then woman

SUMMARY

I don't want to pick on my siblings in Christ whose world is far less grey and far more black and white, who want and maybe need to see these stories as science ... but I don't need that. I'm not interested in the creation museums who want to force these stories together ... and throw in some dinosaurs.

I'd offer an alternative to literalism and story as science
It is one that works with my overall approach to the bible and to life
I want to hold both stories and their differences together ... not force them into one, but to hear both, appreciate the differences, live in the tension

Let me go back to the beginning of the sermon and the joke about chaos
My encouragement to you is to not only recognize the tensions in the bible, the different stories and the different ways of telling the same story
the chaos even ... and embrace the chaos

I've got four wonderfully beautiful and wonderfully different children including boy / girl twins who people still ask, "are you identical?"
I know a thing or two about chaos. I have some experience with it

I imagine you too have experience ...
whatever your family might look like ...with chaos.
My hope and prayer for you is that you will embrace the beautiful, wonderful chaos that is God's creation. It is still being created
Jump into it, swim around in it ... appreciate it, enjoy it. It is good!

I'm going to be talking about majoring in the majors and minoring in the minors a good bit over the next few months. So what is the major this week with this first roman numeral in the outline ... Bible Basics - Creation
Is it about the how or how long of creation? I don't think so!
Isn't it the 'who' ... It is God's! Isn't it the 'what' ... It is good!

How about we end with that? I'll say a phrase and gesture to you to respond
Saying those two things – ***It's Gods! It's Good!***

From the heights of the Himalayas
to the brackish waters of the bayou ... ***It's God's! It's Good!***
From the many faces of the mighty metropolis to the empty spaces
and places of the plains and prairies ... ***It's God's! It's Good!***
From the well worn paths and familiar faces you know so well
to the places and people we could not find on a map ... ***It's God's! It's Good!***