

Discussion Notes

Beginnings: Introduction and Genesis 1:1

September 18, 2016

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How does our story start? The beginning of a story makes sense of the rest. Genesis 1-3 sheds light on our God-given nature and purpose. Here we begin again, rediscovering the origin of our humanity and hope. This nine-week series will ask questions like: Who made us? Who are we? Why are we here?

Introductions

- Do you remember first getting to know your best friend or spouse? What did you talk about? What kinds of questions did you ask?
- The beginning of anyone's story helps to make sense of the rest of his or her story.
- It is the same with the biblical story, *our story* as followers of Jesus. In order to appreciate and understand our story, and to grow and continue in that story, we have to understand the beginning correctly.
- Studying Genesis 1-3 gives us an orientation that helps plot our course and narrative.

What we are here to do

- What we're *not* here to do is to dictate to you exactly *how* the universe came to be and produce an origin theory to solve all our philosophical and scientific questions. Mostly because, as we'll learn, Genesis wasn't written to accomplish these things in the first place.
- We hope we're going to ask what Genesis has to say, and learn how it sets our story straight for everyday life. Our hope is to simply listen to the text, rather than impose our will on it or try and answer questions the text doesn't ask.
- The goal is to open our hearts and minds to God and his word and allow *him* to dictate our journey through Genesis.
- We also want to respond to God and one another as we learn together. One way we'll encourage this is by using the Lord's Prayer as an ongoing response throughout the series. The hope is that we won't just play with ideas but that through prayer we will interact with God as we learn about his nature, our nature, and the created order.

Introduction to Genesis

- Genesis is nothing like a modern textbook; it is an ancient text asking questions and making statements pertaining to its original context.
- Genesis mixes historical narrative with Hebrew poetry—the demands of interpreting these mixed genres are different and require cultural sensitivity.
- Ancient historians were less concerned with chronology than with determining the *meaning* of events for their lives.
- We have to learn to listen and understand through a humble approach to the text.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...

- The centrality of Genesis 1.1 is profound. How do we order and make sense of life? By date, location, task or achievement? By others or by ourselves? No. Biblically, life begins and is ordered by Person.
- John 1.1 borrows these words to introduce Jesus and in a radical way makes a statement about the proximity of Jesus to the Father.
- Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6 begins with "Our Father that is in heaven..." to place God at the beginning and center of our spirituality.
- What we learn through the whole biblical story, and what is set out at the very beginning by Genesis is this: all of life as we know it, and therefore all meaning, all purpose, all significance, anything of substance, begins with the person of God.

A simple question...

- If God is the origin of all creation, if the entire cosmos can't exist without him, if he is central to all of life – *is he central to mine?*
- This first statement in Genesis 1, if we really listen, is remarkably liberating. We are not first defined by what we create or produce, but by the reality that we are a creation.
- In the beginning _____ - what goes in this space?
 - Family, spouse, kids?
 - School, job, success, achievement, approval, fear?
 - Pleasure, leisure, money, control?
- "Before we were formed in the womb, God knew us. We are known before we know. This realization has a practical result: no longer do we run here and there, panicked and anxious, searching for the answers to life. Our lives are not puzzles to be figured out. Rather, we come to God, who knows us and reveals to us the truth about our lives. The fundamental mistake is to begin with ourselves and not God. God is the center from which all life develops. It we use our ego as the center from which to plot the geometry of our lives, we will live eccentrically." (Peterson, Run with the Horses)
- Remember Matthew 7.24-27 and 11.28-30—Jesus reminds us to build our lives on the foundation of His teaching and promises us that His ways are restful.
- The Lord's Prayer begins with the recognition of God's centrality: "Our Father who is in Heaven..."

Discussion Questions

- When have you had something else as the center of your life? How did it feel? Did it work?
- What are the warning signs that God does not hold the central place in your life?
- What practices have you implemented to allow God to remain central?
- How did Jesus keep His Father as His focus throughout His ministry?
- What are the benefits of beginning with God and organizing existence around Him—when you cease to "live eccentrically"?