

Our Identity: Creation

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Date: 18 January 2015

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[0 : 00] Good morning. As Tobin has mentioned, we're starting a new series today on God's story and our story. And over the next 11 weeks or so, we're going to be going through the story of the Bible as a church.

And each of us here today has a story of our lives. We have somewhere that we've been, somewhere that we're going, somewhere that we are now. And our stories are shaped by a number of different things.

They're shaped by culture and what culture says is valuable and what culture says is important. They're shaped by our past experiences. We can see what we've been through and we know what we want more of and what we don't want more of.

Maybe they're shaped by our friends and what our friends say is good and valuable and worth pursuing in life. And just like each of us has a story, God has a story.

God is working in and through history. With a goal in mind. And he tells us about this story in the Bible. The Bible, if you don't know this, is actually a story.

[1 : 06] It's a collection of 66 books that combine to make one story. And there's smaller individual stories within these books. But they combine to tell one bigger, greater story.

And that big story of the Bible is supposed to shape and influence each of our lives and our stories. God gave us the Bible so that the story in there could impact the way that we live today.

And we think that a lot of us, maybe we know the individual stories from the Bible, but we don't know how they all get together and make one bigger story. And because of that, it's very hard for us to live in that story because we don't necessarily know what the full story is.

So what we're going to do over the next 11 weeks is we're going to look at this story of the Bible. And, you know, a lot of us know different stories that we're called and invited to be a part of.

Maybe we know the Disney story. The world is there for you to be happy and prosper. And you are a prince or princess waiting for Prince Charming or Snow White or whoever.

[2 : 17] And you need to follow your heart to find that perfect someone so that you can live happily ever after. Maybe we know the Hong Kong story.

It starts out around preschool because you've got to start in the right preschool. Because if you don't, then your life is over. Once you get into the right preschool, you spend somewhere around 10 to 13 years in the best international schools before being sent out to the prime boarding schools in the U.S. or U.K.

You graduate high school and move on to the Ivy Leagues or Oxford or Cambridge. And you graduate and get a job as a doctor or a lawyer or investment banker. You work for a few years.

You save up your first couple million. Around the age of, like, 30 to 35, you find someone of the opposite gender who's attractive and equally wealthy and has business connections that can help you move forward in life, and you marry them.

And maybe you have a girlfriend on the side in China who can keep you company when you're on business trips. And then a few years later, you have a couple children to secure your legacy.

[3 : 28] You keep working until you reach your financial goals. Then you retire. You travel the world. And if you have enough money left over, you donate it to somewhere so that you can get your name on a building and future generations can remember who you are.

And that's the Hong Kong story of what it means to have this great, wonderful, prosperous, full life. And here's the thing, is that if we know these other stories but we don't know the Bible story, we're going to live by these other stories.

And if what the Bible says is true, then living our lives according to these other stories rather than according to the Bible story is something that will lead to disappointment and death.

If the Bible story is true, the only way to a full, lasting, rewarding, fulfilling life is by being a part of that story and living in that story.

So we want to take time over the next few months as a church to focus on this story, to get into this story. And it's not just something that we want to be an academic exercise. It's something we want to shape our lives.

[4 : 38] And so we've got a couple things outside of Sunday mornings that we're putting together too in the goal of helping us get into this story. So Chris Thornton has put together a Bible reading plan that will go alongside of this sermon series.

He'll have it available after church if anyone wants to grab it for you. You know, it's New Year's. It's that time where we make those resolutions like, I want to read my Bible this year, and then we never do. This is something that's intended to help you with that, to get you into that discipline, to help you understand the full story of the Bible.

So you can grab that Bible reading plan from Chris after church. Also, our community groups over the next few weeks will be going through the story of the Bible as groups. And that will be a great chance for us to get together in the groups, look at the story and discuss it as a group, and be more intentional about applying it to our own lives specifically, and having people around us who can talk to us about it and encourage us in it and help us to get into that story ourselves in our lives.

And again, if you're not in a community group, it's a great opportunity to reinforce what we're learning here and get that story to be a part of your life. So if you're not in a community group, talk to Chris Thornton after church.

Do you want to, like, wave to everyone so they can see who you are? This guy right here. And he will help you get connected to a community group. And also, Watermark Kids and Watermark Youth are going through this same story in their classes right now.

[6 : 05] So if you have kids or youth that are involved in those ministries, after church you can talk to them on the ride home and compare notes with them so that it can be something that's being discussed in your homes throughout the week and not just something that stays here on Sunday mornings.

And so today we're starting this story looking at creation. And now, for those of you who don't know much about the Bible, creation is a huge topic. We could sit here for a year and have a sermon series on creation that lasts the entire year and still not exhaust the theme of creation.

And so trying to cover it all in one sermon is obviously going to leave lots of important stuff out. And so if I'm talking about creation today and there's important stuff about creation that you feel like I'm not saying, you're right, I'm not saying lots of important stuff.

But what we're trying to do today is we're looking at it through a specific lens, looking at a specific angle. What we're trying to look at is two primary things. One, how does the story of creation lay the foundation for the rest of the story of the Bible?

And number two, how does that impact the story of our lives today? How does creation set the foundation for the rest of the Bible story? And how does that impact our lives today?

[7 : 24] So we're not going to take time to look at theories of how the world was created or how long it actually took or anything like that. We're looking at how it fits into the story of the Bible and how that impacts our lives today.

And what we're going to see is that in creation, God establishes his rule, God establishes his place, and God establishes his people.

God establishes his rule, God establishes his place, and God establishes his people. And the first thing is his rule.

Now this is something that from the start flies in the face of our culture. Our culture story says autonomy is the greatest thing possible.

Our culture repeatedly tells us stories where the person who stands up and fights the authority is the hero. Look at the box office from last year, the top grossing movies from 2014.

[8 : 28] What do you have up there? The Hunger Games. Teenage girl fights against the oppressive government who's trying to destroy the lives of their people. Autonomy is king. What else is up there?

Lego movie. Average Joe discovers the key to unlocking the universe and saving his entire universe from the oppressive overlord.

What's the message? Fight the authority. Stand up for you. Be your own hero. Don't trust anyone in authority. That's what culture wants us to believe.

And at the start of creation, we see God establishing his rule. Creation sets the precedent that God is in charge of everything, everywhere, and that the proper response of humanity is obedience and submission to God's rule.

Think about it. The Bible starts with the four words, in the beginning, God. In the beginning, God is there. We are not. Actually, in the beginning, God is there, and nothing else is there.

[9 : 37] God is the one who existed in the beginning, and as such, he is the only reliable source for what happened in the beginning and where the world came from. Also, as the one who is in the beginning, God is the self-existing one.

As the one who created everything else, God is the only one who's not reliant on an outside source for his existence. If you think about it, the Bible says God created everything.

The earth, you and me, the trees, the stars, the animals, everything was created by him. Everything is reliant upon an outside source for our existence.

That outside source being God. God, as the one who was in the beginning, is not reliant on anything outside of himself to exist.

Everything else exists because God chose for it to exist, and God exists. And as God is this pre-existing one who existed before everything else, and the self-existing one who's not reliant on anything else for his existence, God establishes his rule over everything.

[10 : 57] And God establishes his rule over everything with his word. What we see in Genesis chapter 2 is that after God creates the heavens and the earth, the earth is formless, it's void, it's dark, and then in Genesis 3, God speaks.

And as God speaks, the words that God speaks are accomplished. God says, let there be light, and there is light. God says, let the waters separate above and below, and they do.

God says, let dry land come up out of the waters, and it does. God says, how about some trees on this land, and they're there. God says, let's have sun, moon, stars, and they're there.

Birds, fish, done. Animals, all over. It's there. God establishes his rule over everything with his word by creating through his word.

And not only that, but after he's created everything else, God reaches down into the soil that he's made, and he shapes a man in his own image.

[12 : 11] And he establishes his authority over the man by his word. It says that God spoke to the man.

He blessed the man and the woman. He said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And then it jumps ahead and it says, and it was so. Just like in creation where God speaks and it happens, God blesses the man, God gives commands to the man and the woman, and he says, do this and it's done.

God establishes his rule by his word in creation. God also establishes his rule by a word of prohibition to the man and woman.

In Genesis chapter two, we see that God tells them, you may surely eat of every tree that's in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat. For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

[13 : 18] Now God's not unreasonable with this rule. He says, you have every tree in the garden except for one. He's not flaunting his authority. He's not being withholding. He's blessing them, actually.

He's telling them, here's the key to a good, full, plentiful life. Don't eat from this tree. Things will go very, very badly if you do. I love you.

I don't want that to happen. Stay away. And he establishes his rule with his word again. And we'll see in later weeks that Adam and Eve's failure to obey this word and live under this rule causes major issues for them and for every generation that comes after them, including us.

But God's establishment of his rule by his word, it's not something, as culture would have us believe, that's oppressive. It's not something that's mean-hearted. It's not something that's withholding or vindictive.

It's something that's loving. It's the God who knows how the universe works. The God who has created everything and understands best how it is supposed to operate, giving his people the key to a proper life within that universe that he has created.

[14 : 40] And so as God establishes his rule by his word, that is a gift of love from him to his people. In the beginning, God establishes his rule by his word.

Not only does God establish his rule, he also establishes his place. Now in one sense, the entire universe is God's place. God created it all.

God rules over it all. God owns it all. God sustains it all. There's a Dutch theologian named Abraham Kuyper. And he had this quote.

He said, there's not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine. In the entire universe, there's not one square inch where God doesn't look at it and say, that's mine.

Everything is his. Everything belongs to him. But, in the beginning, although everything belongs to him, he reaches down and creates a special place.

[15 : 48] He creates a garden. He creates a special place that is, that is green and filled with gold and rivers and an amazing place.

And this is where he places Adam and Eve. This is the place where God enters into a covenant with his people. and although the entire universe, everything that exists, is God's place in a special way, this Garden of Eden is God's place because it is the place where he and his people meet together.

It's the place where he focuses so much attention during this act of creation and in creation, God establishes this place of Eden.

creation. The third thing that God establishes in creation is his people. If you look at the story of creation in the Bible, it centers around man.

In Genesis chapter 1, you have this least to greatest account where they start off pretty simple with, let there be light. Oh, let's have the sky separated from the water below.

[16 : 58] Let's have some land. And then you get increasing complexity. On the land, let's put trees and plants and then fill it with birds and fish and then have like animals like cows and hippopotamuses and elephants and then let's put man in there.

And the entire creation account in Genesis chapter 1 is building and building and building until it reaches its climax with the creation of man. And then in Genesis 2, we have another creation account that centers around man.

You start out with Adam being created. and God takes the world around Adam and shapes it for his use. He puts the trees and the plants in the field so Adam has food to eat.

He puts the animals there so Adam has things to rule over. And Adam names all the animals and he's in this garden that God has created and he realizes there's no companion for him and God creates the woman.

and that's the climax of the Genesis 2 creation account is the creation of woman to be with man. That God creates the world basically for man.

[18 : 14] and God does this because he loves his people. And when God creates man and woman he creates them in his image.

There's something special and unique and distinct about humanity that sets us apart from the rest of creation. as God establishes his people he doesn't just take some random animal and say like you're going to be my special creation.

No, he takes us he shapes us out of the dust to the ground and he creates us in his image to be his people. There have been lots of theories throughout the years about what it means for us to exist in God's image and we don't have a lot of time to discuss that today but there's a couple important things about us existing in God's image that I do want to say.

First off the fact that we were created in God's image means that in some way that's unique to us and nothing else in all of creation shares we are like God.

In some way that is unique and distinct to us that nothing else in all of creation shares the trees don't share it the dolphins don't share it the birds don't share it we are like God.

[19 : 32] I'm not saying we are God that would be bad but we are like God in a way that is unique and distinct from everything else.

The second important thing about us existing as creation in God's image is that our creation in God's image is closely linked to our command to rule over the rest of creation.

It says God creates us in his image and then he calls us to rule over creation for him. We are God's representatives to the rest of creation. God puts us on the earth and he says I want you to rule over the animals and the birds and the fish and the rhinoceroses in such a way that in your ruling over them they will see my goodness.

in such a way that as you steward the earth you're not exploiting it you're not abusing it you're loving and gentle and kind just as I am loving and gentle and kind to you.

You're stewards and you are to act as my representatives so that through you everything else in all of creation will see who I am. The third important thing about us existing in God's image is that life in community is key to our existence in God's image.

[21 : 02] You notice God doesn't just create man he creates man and woman together. Actually when he just has man there he says it's not good yet there's something wrong and then he creates the woman and he says this is now very good.

The community aspect of our existence in God's image is key. The Bible teaches us that God exists as a trinity with one God three persons which means that from eternity God himself has been existing in perfect community and if we want to be like God and show the world around us who God is we need to be in community.

Although there is the image of God present in each of us as individuals we cannot fully display the image of God outside of a proper community. and actually the creation of community in the Bible story is one of the greatest blessings given to humanity.

If you look at the story in Genesis 2 Adam's there God's making all this stuff he makes the trees he makes the animals Adam's living in paradise ruling over paradise and then God makes the woman and the woman is finally the thing where Adam goes at last look what God made for me.

Right? He's ruling over paradise but it's when he gets community that he says yes this is it this is what I've been waiting for this is good what an amazing gift from God.

[22 : 32] The creation of community is one of the greatest blessings that God gives to man in the entire story of creation. And in this community that God creates there's this openness and this honesty that marks the relationship there.

If you look at the last verse of chapter 2 it says the man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed. This isn't just a physical nakedness this is emotional this is spiritual they're completely open completely honest completely exposed and not only with each other but with God.

They have nothing to hide from God. When things go wrong in the story one of the first things you'll see is that they run and hide from God. But in creation when God makes them they're completely open and honest before him and have nothing to hide.

They're completely open and honest before each other. There's no lying there's no hiding there's no covering up what they've done. They're completely honest and open with themselves. They don't need to lie to themselves about what's happened in the past to try and avoid those dark memories.

Things are good things are right things are as they should be. They're completely open and honest with the rest of creation. They have this right relationship with the rest of the stuff that God has made.

[23 : 49] It's good. It's right. It's as it should be. And next week like I said we're going to see that God that humanity fails to live properly as we're supposed to in God's image.

And when that happens this openness and honesty and community is one of the first things to go. they hide from God. They cover up their nakedness. Their son murders his brother.

Things go downhill so quickly. But at the start this community is one of the greatest gifts. And the last thing I want us to see about creation of humanity in God's image is that this flies wildly in the face of culture's story about human worth and human dignity and human rights.

What does culture want us to believe about who we are? We're an accident. There was this explosion billions of years ago particles sort of formed as they flew through space and the planet arrived and then a couple billion years ago there was this lightning storm that hit some prehistoric gloop in the ground and then life came and we formed out of that.

And really there's nothing special about us nothing unique or distinct about us we're just overdeveloped animals who are a product of accident and chance. It's like Tobin was saying earlier the men who are commenting on these tragedies throughout the world who said yeah so what we're just complicated animals that's how we should act.

[25 : 23] And if humanity's or if culture's story of where humanity came from is true there's absolutely no grounds for human rights for human worth for human value. You know I just came back from the States and in the States there is so much talk going on about race relations right now.

People are upset about the way that police have been treating black people and so there have been calls for retaliation against police. There were people marching on the streets in New York chanting what do we want dead cops when do we want it now?

a man came up to New York and shot two police officers in cold blood because people are so upset about the way that black people are being treated by police in America.

And here's the thing if the Bible story of creation of man in God's image is true then absolutely proper race relations are important and significant and something that we should fight for with everything we have because there are people who exist in God's image who are not being treated as the image of God.

But if culture's story of humanity as an accident as a product of chance is true then there's no reason we should fight for it. If all we are is a product of accident and chance then the strong should pray on the weak because that's how it works in nature.

[26 : 50] If all we are is a product of accident and chance none of us have any inherent worth as human beings. Our value comes from what we do what we accomplish and those who cannot accomplish have no value.

But if the Bible is true if there's something special and unique and distinct about each of us because we have been created in the image of God if there's something about the creator of the universe that's been stamped on to each of us as a person that exists regardless of our race regardless of our accomplishments regardless of our disabilities it's there it can't be removed from us then human rights are incredibly important.

Every human being has value regardless of our skin color regardless of whether we've accomplished anything with our lives we have value because we exist in God's image.

So creation in God's image calls us to live properly in community calls us to fight for human rights it calls us to treat each other with dignity and respect regardless of whether we like each other or not because even if I don't like you you still carry the image of God within you even if you don't like me I still carry the image of God within me.

And as we look at this story of the Bible creation God doesn't just establish us as people in community with each other he also establishes us in a relationship with himself.

[28 : 38] There's a German theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer and he talks about the two stories of creation in the first couple chapters of the Bible he says the first account is about humankind for God the second about God for humankind the first is about God the creator and Lord the second about the fatherly God who is near at hand the first is about humankind as the final work of God with the whole world created before humankind the second just the other way around in the beginning humanity is created and around humankind for the sake of humankind God fashions animals and birds and lets the trees grow basically Genesis 1 is about how God created us for himself and Genesis 2 is about how God is for us Genesis 1 establishes the fact that God is creator and God is Lord and God is in charge and Genesis 2 establishes the fact that although he's in charge God loves us deeply and immensely and he's there for us and he cares for us in these first two chapters of the Bible we have a foundation laid for how we are to relate to God with respect and honor because he is the creator and Lord who is in charge but with love as a father because although he is so in charge and so big he cares for us in both accounts of creation we see God providing for his people he gives us everything we need for life he gives us companionship he provides us with other people around us and he provides us with this awareness of who he is and the ability to have a relationship with him in both creation accounts we see that God is generous to man that God doesn't just create man and leave him in a wasteland but God generously places man in the middle of paradise

God generously gives man access to all of the trees except one in this paradise God's not withholding he's generous in both stories of creation we see that God is gracious God could have created man as a robot who had no choice but to obey but God graciously gives us the freedom to choose to worship him or not God graciously teaches man how to live properly within that freedom and gives him structure and guidelines and rules to help protect him God provides for his people God is generous with his people God is gracious with his people he doesn't desire to see us suffer and die he establishes us with the ability to know him to know him as creator and lord the one who's in charge and to know him as father and friend the one who cares for us and Adam and Eve have a responsibility to respond properly to God's creation and just like them we have a responsibility to respond properly to God's creation and I want to focus today on three primary ways that we're supposed to respond to the fact that God has created the world and everything in it and us the first proper response is worship

God is big no one else can create as he did no one else can sustain as he did or as he does God has created everything God deserves our worship I'm not just talking about singing songs at the end of church when I say worship I'm talking about a life that reflects his bigness and greatness and who he is to the people around us you know I think one of the key ways that we worship God is by getting to know him more and a great way to do that is by reading our Bibles because the Bible is where we learn about who God is like I said at the start of church Chris has a Bible reading plan available for us that if you want to spend more time in your Bible getting to know who God is getting to know about how big and amazing he is and how amazing it is that he loves us and cares about us I encourage you to pick that up from him after service another great way to get to know more clearly who God is is by spending time with other Christians and hearing about what they've experienced of God in their lives and a great way to do that is in community groups so again

I encourage you if you're not involved in the community group get plugged into one the second proper response to God's creation is trust we see in the story of creation that God is big that God is powerful that God sees his work through to completion we see at the end of creation the seventh day comes and God rests from his work because the work is complete God sees the task through to completion and then he rests and enjoys the work that he has done and the fact that God is big and powerful enough to see his work through to completion and the fact that God is faithful to see his work through to completion is a fact that it's just as true today as it was at the time of creation in Philippians chapter 1 verse 6 Paul tells us I'm sure of this he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus God's ability and power to see his work through to completion and his faithfulness to see his work through to completion apply just as much on an individual level in our lives as they do on a cosmic level in creation the God who is at work in our lives today who will see the completion of our transformation into his image through to the end is the same God who saw creation through to the end he's just as powerful he's just as amazing today as he was then and he's just as faithful to see his work through to completion so when we see God working in our lives and we wonder is he ever going to make it all work is he ever going to shape me into who he really wants me to be we can trust that he will because he's the same God now working in us to change us and save us as he was in creation and the third proper response to God's creation is obedience in creation

God establishes his rule by his word this is not a mean word this is not a bad word this is a loving and kind and generous and good word it's instruction on how to live the best most full possible life on earth as humanity and despite the goodness of God's command Adam and Eve decide they want more than what God's already given them and they disobey him and despite the goodness of God's commands to us in our life we continuously decide we want more than what he's given us and disobey him and in creation we see that God is in charge so we owe him our obedience in creation we see that God is good and so it's in our best interest to obey him because he wants what's best for us in creation we see that God is loving and therefore we should obey him because it's a response to that love and yet we all choose every day not to do that we choose to get angry at others because they've insulted us we choose to bend God's rules a little here break them there but creation tells us that we owe him our obedience and the good news is that God's love

[36 : 40] God's generosity and graciousness don't disappear when we disobey he's still loving he's still generous he's still gracious and as we get further into the story what we'll see is that God loves us that God wants us to be his people God wants us to be in relationship with him and that even when we disobey and rebel he is so so strongly wants us in this relationship with him that he's willing to forgive us at great cost to himself if you don't know the rest of the story and you don't want to wait 11 weeks to find out where it goes or how it ends I'd love to talk to you more about it after service but for now we're out of time so we're gonna pray and let us remember God's love in creation God's love for us God's love for the world that he created and our proper response of worship and trust and obedience let's pray

Father we thank you for the fact that you are big and strong and loving and despite your bigness you still care about us as individuals that you bring order out of chaos that you bring light out of darkness that at your word creation responds God we pray that we would respond properly this week as well that we would live lives of worship we would live lives of trust that through our response to your work of creation others would be able to see how big and great you are I pray that this week that we would be obedient to your word even when it's hard even when it doesn't seem like the best path forward we would trust you enough to obey what you say and believe that it is right God we love you we thank you for you being who you are and in Jesus name Amen