

The Beginning

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[0:00] This is a sermon from King's Church West, William. Yes, today we are starting a new series.

! And you can have a little look at this image as I go on.

If you get bored of what I'm saying, you can have a little look at that. And see if you can spot some of the images that you might find. I'll just stand to you as you can see me better. In Genesis 1-11. Now the question that you might be thinking is, well, why? Why are we looking at this particular part of the Bible? Not even just Genesis, but the opening chapters of Genesis.

Well, when we open the Word of God and when we preach, one of the things that we try and want to do is we want to give a sense of God. We want to help the people who are listening meet with God.

[1:10] And that does happen through the Word as we read the Word and explain the Word. People do find that as the Holy Spirit anoints them, they meet with God. But there's another thing that we also try and do is we try and encourage, use this time to encourage people to read the Bible at home and to study and meditate on the words.

Now that's true of the Bible as a whole, from Genesis to Revelation. But these opening chapters, Genesis 1-11, they've been described as the Bible in miniature.

Okay, so it's like the, it's like a, yeah, well just that, the Bible in miniature. And then you've got the Bible as a whole and all these, there's many, many themes that work their way through the Bible. We'll look at some of them briefly, shortly. But all of them find their beginning or find their Genesis in these opening chapters. And so when you read the Bible, you might spot some really strange things in the Bible.

There are some strange things in the Bible. Almost certainly, that strange thing that you find, they'll have some explanation or some beginning in these opening chapters.

[2:22] So it's a good, it's a great thing to have a working knowledge of these chapters. So that later on as the Bible works its way through, you can go, ah, I think I might have some explanation for this really strange thing that's going on over here.

When you look back to the opening chapters of the Bible. And so what are some of these themes? Well, there is, I mean there is hundreds of themes that work their way through the Bible.

But, and all of them are birthed here. But the big one is this, creation, fall, redemption. Okay? Creation, fall, redemption.

That just goes on and on. It's like a cycle. It just works its way through the Bible again and again and again. Even within the chapters that we're going to look at over these next few weeks. It happens at least four times.

This creation, fall, redemption cycle. But some of the other themes that work their way through the Bible that find their beginning here. Things like God's blessing.

[3:21] God's judgment. Temptation and sin. Human pride. Good and evil. The devil's schemes. The tree of life.

Human love and hatred. The meaning of being male and female. The meaning of being made in the image of God. Now, if you're feeling just at the outset, before we even really get into it, thinking, this sounds, this sounds like a bit of a, I'm going to really have to engage my brain in this stuff.

This sounds like it might be a bit of an intellectual thing. Well, up to a degree it will be. But I want to reassure you that everything that we look at here, all this, it is all stories.

We love stories. And everything that we look at here, you will find in any kid's Bible. This is, well, this is actually quite a good one. This is Peter's, my son Peter's Bible, which we read a story from regularly.

The stories we're looking at, we're talking about the seven day creation. We're talking about Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel. The flood. The Tower of Babel. Now, I've checked.

[4:30] And they are all in here. In any half decent kid's Bible, you will find all of these stories. Because, you see, the thing is, the genius in many ways of these opening sections is that they are both understandable by a child, but also they are deep enough to satisfy the intellectual or the philosophical musings of the professor.

You know, a few years ago, in fact, it was when my son Peter was just a few weeks old, we took a holiday to Ireland. Okay, we went to the west coast of Ireland to a place called Connemara. And our campsite was just by the Atlantic Ocean. So every day, me and Jenny, who was six years old. Now, Jenny had just got her first pair of glasses at that point.

That's important. I'll come into the story later. Now, Jenny had just got... And so every day, we would take a little trip down to the beach. It was literally just a few yards from our tent. And we would boast that we were going to swim in the ocean.

Now, in reality, we probably went into the ocean about maybe up to my ankles, between my ankles and my knees, and maybe up to Jenny's knees. But we were in the ocean. You know, we were in the ocean.

[5:45] Now, one day, Jenny left. Because they were new, she kept forgetting them, kept leaving them places. She left them on some rocks at the beach. And it was only in the evening that we noticed the glasses were missing.

So we went down, of course. By this point, the waves were crashing in on the rocks. And next day, we went back when the tide went out. Of course, glasses, nowhere to be seen. And so these glasses have entered the Hale family legend as having adventures through the ocean, meeting sharks and whales and octopuses and all sorts of things.

I mean, the reality is they're probably just smashed on the rocks. But nevertheless, if these glasses did make the adventure into the sea, they plunged the depths of the ocean. And that's, maybe they made it as far as America, who knows.

And that's kind of a little bit of a picture of what way, what you can do with these open chapters of Genesis. You can just dip your toe into it. These are just, up to a point, really engaging, entertaining stories that will engage the mind of a child.

But at the same time, they have the depth of an ocean. And really, it's kind of up to you how deep you want to go. Just as you stand on the beach in Ireland, how deep do you want to go?

[6:57] Well, I guess that's up to you. But because of this reason, as people approach these stories, they make two mistakes. The first mistake is that they think, well, these are just stories for children.

They're basically just fairy stories. You know, how did, you know, talking snakes, animals crowding onto a boat. Come on. Let's be serious.

You know, you might think of it as similar to the Just So stories by Rudyard Kipling. How did the snake start to get on the floor?

How did the elephant get its trunk? You know, it's just fairy stories. It's just fairy stories for children. Well, I want to show you that it's not just fairy stories for children. that they have an incredible depth, which will keep you coming back and showing the problems of the human heart.

The second mistake people make is they think, well, they're stories for scientists. What do I mean by that? Well, in the 19th century, there was an intellectual revolution, which is usually known as the Enlightenment, where it was decided in intellectual circles that you cannot know something unless it can be proven.

[8:22] Okay? And that really revolutionized how people study, how people come to understand the world. Now, that's fine up to a point. But, of course, naturally, when these philosophers, scientists, or the rest of it started to look at the world around us, they wondered, well, where did we come from?

And so one of the sources they looked at was the Bible, because that's what people understood. You know, the world was created by God in six days. And they started to say, well, hang on, there isn't actually any real evidence for this.

And as time went on, biological evidence, geological evidence, seemed to point to actually, this stuff here, it's actually not true. You know, the theories like the theory of evolution, evolution, the age of the earth seemed to be much older, but this geology showed us that the earth's much older than

these stories would imply.

And so, the scientists, the philosophers thought, well, clearly this stuff is just made up. Now, the problem with the way that these 19th century Enlightenment thinkers were looking at this, wasn't that we're wrong exactly to say, well, things need to have evidence.

It's that they were asking the wrong questions. The questions they were asking were clever questions that would satisfy a philosopher of the 19th century.

[9 : 49] They weren't questions that would satisfy an Israelite, nomadic, near-eastern tribe of the Bronze Age. And that's who this stuff was written to.

The questions that this nomadic tribe were asking weren't clever questions like, how did it happen? When did it happen? They were asking questions like, who did it?

Why did they do it? They weren't necessarily clever questions, but they were wise questions. You know, the Bible is what we call ancient wisdom literature.

And when we read it, we need to approach it as such. The questions that we're asking as modern people aren't necessarily the questions that it's answering. Now, my parents happen to be staying with us at the moment, so my children's grandparents.

I don't know if you've ever noticed this. Maybe you remember doing this as a child. When you approach an ancient wise person, which of course my parents are to my children, kids do this thing where they tell them what the world is like, don't they?

[11 : 08] They say things like, but granddad, that is not fair! Or granddad, or grandma, it's like this, or it's like that, or we don't do it that way. Now, when an ancient wise person hears a little child telling them the way the world is, the ancient wise person tends to nod their heads benignly and say, oh yes, really, how very interesting.

However, as the child gets a bit older, maybe a bit wiser, they start to ask the ancient wise person some wise questions, and they get to glean from them some wisdom.

I want to encourage us folks, as we approach these chapters, that we don't do so like a little child, telling scripture the questions that it should be answering, but instead, sitting quietly and learning.

And in my experience, as you approach scripture in that way, scripture, like a grandma or grandfather, tends to slowly but surely open its secrets to you.

These opening chapters of the Bible, they are the Bible in miniature. They start with a man in a garden, eating fruit, and finding himself naked.

[12 : 25] And it ends with a man on a hill, having come through the waters of death, making a sacrifice, which God will look on with favor and give an amazing promise to all mankind.

These chapters, like the rest of the Bible, point to Jesus. Jesus himself said, all scriptures testify about me. Now, one of the great things that we'll be doing is we will be finding Jesus in these opening chapters.

And you might think, well, hang on a second, they were written about a thousand years before Jesus was born. Do you know, Jesus is everywhere in these chapters. Now, you have to look for him.

It's a bit like opening up a Where's Wally book. He's in there somewhere, and once you see him, you can't unsee him. But he's definitely in there. We're going to do things slightly differently.

We're going to actually, we've recorded part of the scripture that we're going to read. So, Dave, if you wouldn't mind playing that audio. Genesis 1, this is 1 to 10.

[13 : 38] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, let there be light, and there was light.

God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day. And God said, let there be a vault between the waters to separate the water from water. So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault sky, and there was evening, and there was morning, the second day and God said let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear and it was so God called the dry ground land and the gathered water as he called seas and God saw that it was good excellent thank you whoever it was that read that wonderful scripture so let's just let's just go through the day shall we day one in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth sounds kind of obvious to us doesn't it it's so familiar to us who created the universe well God created the

universe and even those 19th century atheistic philosophers they did sort of accept even though they were desperate to try and prove God didn't exist they did sort of accept that because there had to have been a beginning and there was there had to be an uncaused cause maybe God could be that cause they would let us have that for the time being but you know that statement although it sounds so obvious to us such an uncontroversial thing in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth to the people hearing that that would have been a radically controversial thing to say you see Israel remember that nomadic tribe walking through the desert they were surrounded by other tribes and peoples and their creation stories were anything but like this most of the creation legends and myths that surrounded them involved some kind of cosmic battle between a whole host of gods and most the stories and the creation came about because a god spilt his blood and and that was the the planets and the sun being formed they believe there was some kind of cosmic battle going on but the genesis story tells a very different story it says the god is sovereign there may be other mini gods many elohim as it's called in the bible but they do not rival the sovereignty of the living god the one who created the heavens and the earth now the earth was formless and empty darkness was over the surface of the deep i found out probably my favorite phrase in in hebrew this week when i was looking at this the watery chaos the earth was formless and empty would you like to hear it the words you describe there is *tohu vabohu* say that with me *tohu vabohu* that means formless and empty now to introduce you to this i've got to we've got to get our heads into the into the way of looking at the world of of ancient hebrews now for us we say what what was the universe like before the universe created and we sort of imagine like nothingness don't we we just it was just nothing there now the hebrews thought very differently for them nothingness was like chaos it was just there was no form there was nowhere there was no ability to sustain life and what is the most chaotic thing that they could possibly comprehend well it was darkness and it was waters so they imagine the the earth as it existed as a kind of watery chaotic mass it couldn't sustain life no light no land but the spirit of god was hovering over the deep and then god said let there be light what a moment that must have been what can you imagine if i don't think any of us can even

comprehend there had been no light there had not been even the concept of light and all of a sudden boom light the the only person i think who could have any inkling what this must have been like must be the man that we meet in john chapter 9 who's been born blind and jesus heals him whoa stuff light i can see for us maybe i don't know if you can imagine having never heard music never ever in your life heard music and then all of a sudden you hear music what was that or maybe all you'd ever eaten was tasteless horrible gruel and all of a sudden you get to taste the sweet taste of sugar whoa what is that i mean it's a it's a pale illustration but maybe it gives us some inkling let there be light and god saw that the light was good and there was light and there was darkness darkness you know it's interesting light and darkness you might think oh the light was good but the darkness was bad the lord saw that it was good remember he is sovereign over all things the good and the bad the light and the dark so what happens in day two let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water friends again we're gonna have to get our heads into the way the hebrews thought so i'm gonna draw a picture i know i don't do stuff like this very often i've even got some slides later amazing i know this is what we again again we you know we see the world as kind of this because that you know we know that's what it's like it's a sphere it's a globe and then it goes around the sun and there's the universe is massive and all the rest of it this is more like how the how the hebrews saw the universe they saw it as a kind of snow globe okay and the waters we've got water down here okay at some point god separates water from water and so above us we have water i know that above us is not water but you think about it kind of makes sense the water comes from the sky doesn't it when it rains it's not that unreasonable thing well there's water above us there's water below and god gives us this kind of little bubble of order in the chaos around us there's chaos down here chaos above but in the middle we've got this little bubble of order a life-sustaining order where we can live okay so god separates water from water then what does what does he do he says let their let dry ground appear dry ground so can we see this by the way you see a dry ground appears just like that okay out the waters this wonderful dry ground appears he calls the dry ground land and he calls the waters seas now god says let the land produce vegetation we're in day three here i think we are no we're still in day two sorry i'm getting muddled myself we're in day three sorry okay so let the land produce vegetation what does it say it says let uh land choose vegetation seed bearing plants with trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it trees and fruit that's interesting they mentioned that do you think trees and fruit might come into the

story somewhere i think they might let's see okay and then there was morning and there was evening the third day and then says let there be lights in the sky the sun oh the sun and the moon so we've got the sun here okay got the sun there lovely and we've got the moon over here so the sun kind of looks like a bit of a sad face that now doesn't it um i've got the moon over here so the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night now i just want to stop there for a second because there's this amazing verse which i think is verse where are we and he also made the stars which verse is this i've lost it 16 verse 16 now david i want you to do me first so in this little verse we're talking about the rest of the universe so david have you got that slide for me here now i think i think of the world as quite a big place you know like the beach boys i've been all around this great big world and it's big it's big isn't it the world well hang on a second how big is it really let's let's just take go to the next slide david oh there's the earth there and then you've got some really big planets jupiter saturn all the rest of them some really big planets let's see now oh but there's jupiter compare that to the sun and this even bigger not very bright looking planet called sirius all of a sudden the earth is this tiny little thing over here let's keep going david what else we've got so oh but there's sirius now look at aldrabaran wow that is absolutely enormous let's keep going should we go one more time there's aldrabaran and there's beetlejuice i think we've even got one more have we there's beetlejuice which is like the little brother to the affectionately known v v y canis majoris we are he also made the stars and by the way that's just some of the stars in our galaxy in the milky way and there's like a bajillion galaxies within the universe he also made the stars let's circle back though back into our hebrew worldview mindset over here that outside is chaos we are just a little tiny bubble of life-sustaining order it's a reasonable question at this point to ask is it really true though is it was it really the case that that god created the world up to this point in four days two more days of creation to go in six days is that really how when i say days i mean 24 hour period is that is that really true because you know it is it is true that the the physical evidence that we have points to something completely different a much older a much longer creation so it's a reasonable question to ask and with it i don't want you to think that i'm kind of chickening out that i'm i'm allowing a scientific worldview to to um to overrule what it says in the bible you know i believe as much as anybody else in the bible is god breathed and and it should be accepted as truthful well i think it's interesting when you look at day four to answer that question day four let there be lights in the sky the sun and the moon now what i want to ask you constitutes a day a 24 hour period well it's the sun rising in the east passing over and setting in the west isn't it you know we're aware of that clearly the people who around them would have been aware of that probably more aware than us because we have electric lights that can effectively extend the day haven't we they didn't have any electric lights a day was a 24 hour period was sun rising and setting and then the moon waxing and waning but hang on a second the sun doesn't appear till day four so what about days

[26:13] one to three how can they be days how can they be 24 hour periods so i want to suggest that what the bible presents to us isn't necessarily to be understood as a 24 hour period it could be it could be the obvious reading of it is that there was morning there was evening the second day the third day etc but i think we we have here a little bit of license to think well maybe a day could be a longer period of time and and that stands up with the hebrew word which is yom which is usually translated as day by which we which which which means a 24 hour period but it can also mean a day like an epoch like in my grandfather's day it can mean that the same word so it doesn't necessarily point to 24 hour days but it but it could do now the point here isn't that i'm trying to justify what the bible says and or try and bring together a scientific and a biblical worldview particularly i'm not particularly interested in doing that i'm just i'm just saying there is scope within this text here to have for more than one opinion okay but also i think what this gives us is an invitation to look a little bit deeper because if the sun doesn't turn up till day four which clearly states it doesn't you recall it was in day one the god said let there be light didn't he so that begs the question well what was the light now i said to you earlier that jesus appears all over these pages but you just have to look a little bit deeper to find him after the life death and resurrection of jesus one of his disciples a man named john was meditating on the connection between jesus the man and jesus the living god and he wrote the gospel of john let's read the opening words of that gospel so i missed it's okay just go straight through in the beginning was the word and the word was with god and the word was god he was with god in the beginning through him all things were made without him nothing that was made that has been made in him was life and that life was the light of all mankind the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it let's fast forward to

john chapter 8 here's what jesus said i am the light of the world whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of light could it be that this light which light lit the world was not in fact the sun but was actually jesus himself maybe let's fast forward way beyond from where we are now right to the end of time the closing chapters of revelation i did not see a temple in the city because the lord god almighty and the lamb are its temple the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of god gives it light and the lamb meaning jesus is its lamp the nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring in their splendor we are showing a picture here of creation closing with heaven meeting earth and there being no more sun or moon but we are but all the light that we need comes from the lamb comes from jesus i want to put it to you folks that the end matches the beginning that the light that brought the universe into being was jesus himself the bible tells a story which is all about jesus is only about jesus and in him we find life and redemption i'm just going to close in prayer i want to thank you lord jesus that you were there in the beginning you brought into being the beginning in you is life and that life is the light of men lord we we give ourselves to you again we stand in awe of the amazing creation you brought to us that you have been the light which shines in the darkness and we look forward to a day when we will meet you face to face and the light that comes from your face will light our way in heavenly dwellings for all eternity we thank you lord jesus for your goodness to us we pray you'd open our hearts so that we might see you more fully as we meditate upon the word of god through these chapters and into the rest of the bible we thank you lord for this indescribable gift hallelujah amen amen