

“Long Story Short - Creation”

Scripture: Genesis 1

Graphics: puzzle, creation

Big Truth: The Bible tell us the grand story of God’s redemptive plan for the world. Though Creation, the Fall, Israel, Jesus, the Church, and New Creation, the Bible is sufficient for our salvation. Every person who comes to Panama UMC is called to love God, self, others and the entire creation because God created the universe complete, purposeful, from and for community.

Focus phrase: God created the universe complete, purposeful, from and for community.

1. Introduction

- A. Today we’re starting a new online adventure, church! It’s called Long Story Short, and we’ll look at 6 grand movements in the bible that will cover the entire bible.
- B. But before we dive into the first movement, let me ask you a question: Do you always understand everything you read in the bible after you read it? Ya...me neither. That’s why spending time getting the big picture is important for us.
- C. My wife Stacy loves puzzles. I suspect that’s one reason she married me ☺ . When we go on vacation, she likes to buy a new jigsaw puzzle...usually of something that will remind her of the place we visited. After we get home, she loves to work hours to put thousands of pieces in their proper place.
- D. I, on the other hand, am NOT a puzzle fan. Since I’m partially color blind and I struggle with having the patience to focus on any one thing for very long, I’ve spent most of my life avoiding puzzles. Sometimes, I pick up a piece or two when someone’s doing a puzzle, but I usually give up pretty quickly.
- E. I DO know, however, that the KEY to putting a puzzle together is to look at the picture on the box while you’re putting it together. See, because the box has the WHOLE PICTURE. And seeing the whole picture can give you a better idea of how each piece fits into the puzzle.
- F. Today we’re starting a new series of messages to give us the big picture of what’s in this book, the Bible. And getting the big picture will help us put the pieces together when we read the Bible.
- G. For many people, their relationship with the Bible is like my experience with jigsaw puzzles: You’ve looked at an isolated piece or two maybe a few verses, but never quite figured out how it all fits together.
- H. If we look at the Bible in only isolated pieces, it’s hard to make sense of it. Some lines can even be a bit funny or confusing if taken out of context. For example, there’s this verse that you can quote if you’re dating:
 - i. *Greet one another with a holy kiss.* (2 Corinthians 13:12) (NRSV)

- I. Then there is this verse that justifies my ‘love handles’:
 - i. *All fat is the Lord’s.* Leviticus 3:16b (NRSV)
- J. As my beard and remaining hair keep turning gray, I like this verse more and more:
 - i. *The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair.* Proverbs 20:29b
- K. On the other extreme, there are times that this type of selective verse-quoting has also been used to justify people’s selfishness and even abuse.
 - i. There were several verses, including Ephesians 6:5a that were used by slave owners to oppress people:
 - ii. *Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear.* Ephesians 6:5a (NIV)
- L. Others just seem impossible, like when Jesus says...
 - i. *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Matthew 5:48a (NRSV)
 - ii. That verse usually makes me want to give up on my faith. First, it seems confusing. Is God saying perfectionism is good? Also, I know me and I’m not perfect so I guess I’m out!?
- M. **These and many other verses only make sense if we see the big picture of what’s in the Bible.**
- N. So for today and the next five weeks, we’re going to take a “box cover” look at the story of the Bible. We’re basing this series on a book by Joshua McNall entitled Long Story Short, which is the title of this series. **(picture of the book cover)**. I’m also grateful for the pastors at Grace Church in Florida who help resource us for this series.
- O. We pray this will do two things:
 - i. First, we pray that this will help us gain an understanding of the full story of the Bible fro cover-to-cover.
 - a. In his book, McNall breaks down the entire story of the Bible into six parts. Think of it like binge-watching a series on Netflix with six seasons. They are entitled: **Creation, The Fall, Israel, Jesus, the Church, and New Creation.**
 - b. If you’d like to get a copy of the book, the link is here **(LINK)** . I invite you to follow along each week.
 - c. We will also be offering an online Bible Study via Zoom each week starting this week on Weds at 10a and Thurs at 7p so we can dive deeper.

- ii. Secondly, this series will awaken in us the desire to read the Bible and reflect on scripture in a new way, with the big picture in mind.
 - a. The Bible is the oldest, most verifiable book we have about God. It's the most read, most studied and scrutinized book of all time. The Bible is actually made up of 66 books written by over 40 authors over 1,500 years in two primary languages. Even though the authors of the Bible work independently from each other, come from different continents, cultures, and walks of life, the miraculous thing is the unified story about God they each share. Their words have shaped human history as literally billions of people have read the words in the Bible. People have gained far more than knowledge...they've experienced a transforming encounter with God through the Bible.
- iii. To understand the Bible, we have to start, not surprisingly, at the **beginning**. Pastor Jorge Acevedo teaches that understanding the first few chapters of Genesis is a "top button issue." When you're buttoning a shirt, if you don't get the top button right, the rest of them won't line up.
- iv. The first few pages of the Bible help the rest of the story "line up." If we get this wrong, the rest is not going to make sense.

2. Scripture

- A. So, let's begin at the beginning - Season one, episode one. It's all about where the story begins. Your story, my story, all of our stories!
- B. If you're taking notes, here's the question we're asking today: **What does the Bible say about how God created the universe?**
- C. If you study world cultures throughout history, you quickly find out that the account of Creation in the Bible is not the ONLY creation story out there. In fact, just about every culture has some version of a creation account.
- D. Every one of the OTHER major creation accounts starts in one or 2-3 ways: either the world began as a result of some cosmic violence or war, OR creation happened because of some conflict between gods and humans.
- E. The Judeo-Christian Creation account is a strikingly different kind of story. And it was entrusted to one of the least likely groups of people ever. Of all the creation accounts through history, the one in the Bible is unique.
- F. Let's take a look at two ways this story begins in such a unique way.
- G. First, in the Bible, **God created the universe complete and purposeful**.
 - i. In Genesis, as you start reading the Bible, you'll quickly notice God creates in chapter one and then does it again near the start of chapter two. Why? Well, these are two accounts of same event, but from different perspectives.

- ii. The first, in Genesis 1, is a majestically poetic, **big picture view** of God’s creation. With beautiful prose and rhythm, it recalls the seven-days that God created the world from nothing. It’s the big picture story with world-shaping news.
- iii. The second is a more **intimate look** and reads like a story. In Genesis 2, we read a more detailed, “local-news” creation story. This is when we are introduced to the first humans, Adam and Eve.
- iv. Both accounts point to how God created the universe. Each communicates truth to us about who GOD is, who WE are, and how we are to relate to God, to others, to the creation, and to ourselves.
- v. The creation accounts in Genesis tell us that we’re not here as the result of a war of gods, or by some random explosion of gasses or atoms. In the Genesis accounts, **God creates the universe with intention**; both **complete** and **purposeful**. The author of Genesis reports that God gave a repeating declaration throughout the first verses. One of them is verse 10:
 - a. *And God saw that it was good.* Genesis 1:10 (NRSV)
- vi. In your Bible, circle the word “good.” This refrain is repeated five times: God creates, and then declares, “It is good!”
- vii. This is not a moral goodness, because nothing evil or bad is present at this time. The Director of Hebrew Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. Bill Arnold, says in his book Genesis, that the ‘goodness’ in this verse implies that creation was: (ON SCREEN) “...exactly what God had in mind. It is just what God ordered, no more and no less than perfection, and completely satisfying to God in every respect”. (Dr. Bill Arnold, Genesis, p. 40)
- viii. Like an artist admiring his/her work, God stands back and is pleased with the result. “Good” means that creation is complete, lacking in nothing, it was...perfect.
- ix. This reveals God’s nature to us. Human-made gods are often imagined as flawed, power hungry, jealous, and even predatory. The Bible helps us to understand God’s nature in a totally different way. God’s creation is good because God is good. God’s creation is perfect because God is perfect. God’s creation is complete because God is complete.
- x. In addition to learning about God’s nature in these opening verses, we learn about ourselves as well. Look with me at Genesis 1:26 where we make our “entrance” on the grand stage of the creation story. (ON SCREEN)
 - a. *Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of*

the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”
Genesis 1:26 (NRSV)

- xi. The Bible declares that humanity was made unique and special above all other created life, for a purpose to steward and oversee all God’s creation. This goes beyond a “to-do list.” In fact, this points to our very being. If you are taking notes, circle the words “in our image” in that verse.
- xii. **All people are created in the image of God.** God is big enough to rule this mighty universe, but small enough to live within our hearts. One way to think of this is that there is a “God-gene” in our spiritual DNA.
- xiii. John Wesley, the founder of our Methodist movement, says that the image of God means that like God, we have the capacity for reason and choice, responsibility for leadership and management, and an ability to make moral decisions. We can discern issues of justice and mercy, right and wrong, and what’s true and false. Most of all, the image of God creates a hunger inside of our soul for a relationship with Him.
- xiv. All people are created in the image of God. The problem is that some people don’t know this news yet. Others haven’t submitted their lives to God’s leadership. Other times, we simply forget.
- xv. These words call us to remember the goodness of how God created us. When we say things like, “I’m just a sinner, I’m just human!” that’s bad theology. The Bible teaches that to be sinful is to be subhuman... less than what we are created for. We’ll talk about that next week. But God created you and every person on this planet to reflect His good image.
- xvi. Look with me at Genesis 2:15 for more on our purpose: *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.* Genesis 2:15 (NRSV)
- xvii. Our assignment as humans is to “tend and watch over” what God has entrusted to us. When you and I wake up in the morning, **we have a reason and purpose for which to live.** We’re to bring God glory in our work and daily life. Ephesians 2:10 says that “we are God’s workmanship, created to do good works.”
- xviii. Each one of us is called to be in the center of God’s will for our lives...to be living on purpose for Him.
- xix. What does this all mean? As your pastor, let me share with you from my heart: This means you're not an accident. You are here for a purpose. A good God made you to reflect His complete image. You are God-dreamed, God-designed, and God-desired. You are created ON PURPOSE and FOR A PURPOSE. We need you. You are unique in who you are. You are called to make a difference in this world.

- H. But, thankfully, life is more than me or you, isn't it? So, what ELSE does the Bible say about how God created the universe?
- I. Well, secondly, it says **God created the universe from and for community.**
- i. Back in verse 1:26, take a careful look at one part of it. Read it again with me: Then God said, *“Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...”*
 - ii. I want to just say something about the word “us” and “our.” Why did the author use the plural to describe God’s conversation? Most scholars think this is a foreshadowing of the Trinity. Followers of Jesus have affirmed that God is understood as three-in-one and one-in-three (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). It’s a mystery that points to God’s living in constant community with Himself.
 - iii. No preacher has fully explained how God is one, yet also Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Personally, I would rather believe in a God that I can’t understand, than shrink God to the size of my finite brain. So let’s abandon our need to create God in our image. Instead, just catch a glimpse that God exists in community. When we are created, we are created FROM community.
 - iv. *So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.* Genesis 1:27 (NRSV)
 - v. Both men and women are distinct, yet both bear the image of God. But notice that the image of God is about community. When God creates, God does so in community.
 - vi. This is a theme throughout the Bible: The story of Israel is about a community. When Jesus came, he came to a family in a town. He calls disciples to a new community. When the Holy Spirit comes Pentecost, they wait in community. In Acts 2, 3,000 are added to their number. When God made you and made me he made us part of a family.
 - vii. God does this because the first crisis that appears in the story of the Bible is not a moral one, but a community/family one. Look with me at Genesis 2:18: (ON SCREEN) Then the Lord God said, *“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”*
 - viii. Did you hear that? God has been saying things are “good” and “very good” all along... now something is “not good”!
 - ix. What did God say was not good? Aloneness! God said “I did not make my best creation - my finest work - to go through life alone. I made humanity to be social.” The big idea is that God made us for each other. We were made to be social.

- x. We're seeing the dangers of trying to "go it alone" in our culture and world in huge ways right now. We're in a forced mode of separation. We were never MEANT to be cut-off from each other. But, church, the day is coming when we'll be back together...and we have a brand new opportunity to re-engage more fully than before, even starting now!
- xi. **God's answer to isolation and separation is the family of God.** It's about ONE ANOTHER. Did you know that fifty-eight times in the New Testament the word "one another" is used? "Love one another, care for one another, pray for one another, exhort one another, encourage one another, greet one another," and on and on.
- xii. God wants you to care for others and be cared for BY others.
- J. If you're struggling right now with depression or loneliness or isolation, know that you're not broken...God never intended us to be apart like this. It's necessary for a little while, but it will end. In the meantime, keep reaching out to others for help to be BE a help. Call me or someone who can pray with you... or just talk.

3. Conclusion

- A. God's story begins with creation. It starts with the love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit overflowing into a created universe.
- B. This week, spend some re-reading the creation account in Genesis. How do you fit in that picture?
- C. The universe, and you in it, was created complete. The universe, and you in it, was created with purpose. The universe, and us in it, was created FROM community...and it was created, FOR community. For US.
- D. That's the beginning of the story of this book (BIBLE), and it can be your story as well. God created you complete and on purpose. God created you from and for community.
- E. Let's pray and then we'll close with one final song about How Great God is!
- F. PRAY!