

Session Two: The Story of the Gospel - Creation

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[0 : 00] Welcome back to Gospel Growth. My name is Brian Hart, and we're continuing to talk about what it means to get the gospel.

The gospel is a big story, and it's the story of God and of the world, of human history, and really of all of history.

Now, sometimes when we talk about the gospel, we can talk about it like it's just about you or me, or it's just about our personal relationship with God.

And that is true, all of that's true, but I would say the gospel is much bigger than that. Like every good story, there's a personal story, but there's also a bigger story, even a cosmic story.

You can think of it like Star Wars. In that story, you've got at one level, there's a situation between a young man named Luke Skywalker and his father, Darth Vader, and there's a personal story of reconciliation between a father and a son.

[1 : 10] But there's also something bigger than that happening. There's a story of the rebellion versus the empire and these opposing groups of people who are fighting for control. But then even above that, there's really this story that concerns the fate of the whole galaxy and light versus dark.

The story of the gospel is very much like that. At one level, it is profoundly personal. It's a story about you and your relationship with your father and how you can be reconciled to him.

But there's also a bigger story, a story about a community that God is reconciling to himself. And that community is the church, the people of God, the bride of Christ.

And then there's even another story which really concerns the fate of the whole world. And how did the world become broken in the first place, filled with evil and suffering? And how is God going to put it all back together again?

If the only view of the gospel that we have is the very personal one, the one that only takes into account my personal relationship with God, and how can I personally find forgiveness for my personal sins, that would be kind of like saying that Star Wars is just a story about Luke Skywalker and his father.

[2 : 29] All those things are true, the forgiveness of our sin and our personal relationship. But there is so much more. There is a cosmic story happening. So if the view of the gospel that we have, if it's just about us, we're not going to really understand the Bible very well.

Because the story of the Bible concerns all of this. It concerns the micro kind of story and the macro cosmic story. The next few sessions that we're going to be doing in gospel growth, we're going to be looking at this big story of redemption that the Bible is telling.

And today we're going to start with Act 1, which is creation, which starts at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis. This is a very important place to start if we're going to talk about what it means to get the gospel.

Because Genesis isn't just the beginning of the Bible, it's the beginning of this gospel story. Now creation for a lot of Christians, it's just something to argue about.

You know, how did the world get here and how much time did it take? You know, really, I would say, and a lot of people would say, the Bible and Genesis in particular is not trying to ask the same kind of questions or it's not trying to address the same kind of questions that a scientist might ask.

[3 : 41] So we don't have to pit the Bible against science. The Bible is concerned with who made the world and why did he do it? And I would say you will never really understand anything in your life.

You know, whether it's something you might buy like an automobile or your phone, you cannot really understand anything you interact with unless you can understand what it's made for and something about where it's from.

Because the one who designed it, the creator or designer of that thing, is the one who tells you how to use it. And so this is what we see at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis 1.

In the beginning, God. Those are the first words in the Bible. The story begins with God. This is a big God.

And the story of the Bible isn't primarily the story about you or a story about me. It's first and foremost, the story about him. And creation, the story of creation, gives us some perspective on the power of God, on the wisdom of God.

[4 : 45] The story of creation shows us that there is nothing else in the universe like God. In fact, the universe is created. Everything, one of the ways that we're different from God is that everything else is created and he is uncreated.

He is eternal. The scope of creation tells us of his sovereignty, his artistry, his majesty. And it calls to mind that line in the psalm.

He's got the whole world in his hands. Everything created he made and he is in control of it. God came before creation. Everything came from him and everything came for him, for his purposes. Now, we have a hard time thinking about these things. We have a hard time imagining a God who existed eternally before anything was, there was God.

But we should marvel at this a little bit. Should, I mean, it's just worth letting our imaginations just even attempt to consider how grand he is and how big he is. What was that eternity of time like before God created anything?

[5 : 53] We, frankly, don't know much, but we do know one thing. It wasn't lonely. God wasn't lonely. As Christians, we believe that God is triune.

We believe in something called the Trinity, which reflects what Scripture reveals. That there is one God, but he exists in three persons. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What that means is before God made you or me, before he made anything, before the universe was here, God has always existed in relationships before we created anything else.

And that means that God didn't need us. That means that God wasn't sitting around bored. He didn't need to have people to be in a relationship with. He had relationships already, relationships that were perfect.

And frankly, he could have carried on like that in total bliss and perfect harmony. But he chose to do something different. Again, Genesis 1, in the beginning, God created.

[6 : 51] From the beginning, we see that God didn't make us because he needed us. He wanted us. He didn't create us out of loneliness, but out of love. The whole story of the gospel, as you're going to come to see through this course, the whole story of the gospel is a story of grace, a story of God lavishly giving.

And that is the story of creation. God giving out of his graciousness. Creation is an act of grace. God didn't have to make us. He chose to. And he didn't make us because of what we could do for him.

God didn't make you so that you could run around doing a bunch of tasks that he needs you to do. God made you so that he could do something for you. From eternity past, the Trinity has existed in these perfect relationships of love and harmony.

And Jesus says something amazing about how we get to get in on that. John 17, verse 24, Jesus is praying to his father. And he says, Jesus tells his father that he wants us to be with him and to see him and to know the love of God that has existed from eternity past.

God made you not so you could do something for him, but so that he could do something for you. To bring you into his loving family. And of course, we do get to do all kinds of things for him.

[8 : 30] But that's not why God made us. He made us because he wants to love us. To be in relationship with him. So we have to start there. Start with the creator that this story is about.

But creation doesn't just tell us something about God. It also tells us something about ourselves and the world around us. God's original intentions for it all. Later in Genesis chapter 1, it says, And God saw everything that he had made and behold, it was very good.

All God made was very good. Now we don't often feel that way, do we? We look around the world and we see all kinds of things that aren't good. There's pain, there's brokenness, there's sadness, there's outright evil.

And it's easy to wonder, how could God allow all of this? Why would God create a world like this? Well, the beginning of this story shows that what we're seeing, all that brokenness, that was never

part of the original plan.

God's original plan for the world was very different. He made it very, very good. He put us into a perfect garden. Where we had perfect relationship with both him and with one another.

[9 : 39] And also with the world around us. Now in the next session, we're going to look more specifically at why the world doesn't feel that way anymore. But for now, we just want to highlight that this story is about a good God who created good things for really good purposes.

And when our lives are ordered rightly around his designs for us, it's very good. It's important to start here. It's important to start with this understanding that you have a really good God who is a good father.

And you are a good part of his good creation. Because if you don't start there, if you don't really, if you don't just start there, if you don't live in light of that. What will happen is you will feel like you haven't discovered your purpose in life or your identity.

What you're here for. We find our purpose and identity in our creator. So what are you for? What is life for?

People have wrestled with these questions for ages. And the way that you will answer those questions will somehow have to take into account your origin story.

[10 : 50] Whatever origin story you believe. Because if you don't reckon with where you're from, you will never be able to understand who you really are. If you believe that you're here because of a random accident, just freak chance, then that will make it very difficult, if not impossible, to find true meaning in the world.

True meaning for your life. It will be very difficult to find any real purpose that you didn't just kind of make up in your head. There's a famous atheistic scientist named Stephen J. Gould and he wrote this.

We're here because one odd group of fishes had a particular fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures. Because the earth never froze entirely during an ice age.

Because a small and tenuous species arising in Africa a quarter of a million years ago has managed so far to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a higher answer, but none exists.

This explanation, though superficially troubling, if not terrifying, is ultimately liberating and exhilarating. We cannot read the meaning of life passively and the facts of nature.

[12 : 04] We must construct these answers ourselves from our own wisdom and ethical sense. There is no other way. Now, this man says he is exhilarated by the idea of constructing his own meaning.

But I can tell you as a pastor, most people are not exhilarated by that. For most people, it actually is simply terrifying or even depressing. And I would say it's just not how we're made to live.

It's not how we're meant to live. If you decide that where you're from is a meaningless accident, just a random cosmic blip in the universe, it's very difficult to say that your life has any meaning at all.

But if you know, if you know that you have a creator, that you have a design and there's a designer behind the design, then that means you were created with purpose and meaning.

And it means that the way that we discover the meaning of our lives, the way to discover it is not to look inside and not to figure it out for ourselves. It's to look to him, to the one who created us.

[13 : 10] I want you to imagine that you were somehow kept in the dark for the last few decades and you had never heard of a smartphone. You never heard of an iPhone. You never heard of any of it. And someone gave it to you and you would reasonably wonder, what is this thing for?

And maybe you couldn't figure it out and so you used it as a kind of attractive paperweight or maybe even a doorstop. Those, I mean, you can use a smartphone as a paperweight.

I think we would all agree, though, we're really missing the point of the thing if that's all we're doing with it. It's treating it like a glorified rock. If you really want to know, if you want to find out what the meaning of a smartphone is, at some point you're going to have to find out who made this thing.

That's where you would start. And maybe, you know, they actually come with a manual. You might even read that manual and find out what it's capable of doing and what it's used for.

See, you could use it. You could have the thing. But you could use it so wrongly. You could waste its potential. Or you could use it so wrongly. Or you could use it so wrongly. Or you could use it so wrongly.

[14 : 16] Or you could use it so wrongly. What did the people who made this thing, what did they have in mind when they made it? If we want to know what our meaning is, what we're for, we have to go to our creator.

Genesis 127 says, Now, there's so much that we could say about what it means to be made in the image of God.

But we'll just leave it at this for today. One of the things that this means is that you and I are made to be God's representatives. And in the ancient Near East, an image of the God represented the God.

And that's what we are. In fact, one of the reasons that the Israelites were told not to create images of the God is because God's image was put in us. A stone or a wood carving can't represent God. It has no agency in the world. We do that. We get the privilege of living in the world as God's agents and representing his rule and his reign. The way we discover our identity and purpose is not by looking inside.

[15 : 27] It's by looking up to our creator and seeing what he has said. It's not by asking, how do I want to live in the world? What do I want to live for? But asking, how was I created to live?

And what was I created to live for? The reality is that if there is a creator, then he is the most important reality in the world.

And we must live submitted to him. If we are creatures and we have a creator, then not only do we find our identity and our purpose in him, we also find that we owe him everything.

If God created us, then we are accountable to him. Everything we have is because of him. In the Psalms, which is the hymn book or the praise book of God's people, many of the Psalms speak about creation as one of the main reasons that we worship God.

Psalms 148 verse 5, for example, says, Let them praise the name of the Lord for he commanded and they were created. The appropriate response to having a God who is your creator and your designer is awe and worship.

[16 : 41] Discovering that your creator tells you who you are is wonderful, but it also demands a response from you. If God is your creator, sure, that gives meaning to our relationship with him, but it also means that we owe him and we are actually, from the very beginning, by virtue of the fact that we were made by him, we realize we have to do what he says.

We have to obey him. How could we not? He's the one who made us. It means we don't get to define our own realities or live our lives as if he doesn't exist.

If our lives were meaningless acts of random chance, it's true our behavior ultimately might not matter that much. But if there is a creator, we are accountable to how he wants us to live.

So I would say it is a foolish thing to try and disagree with God about how we're supposed to live or why we're here or what we're supposed to be doing.

We owe him everything. And that is the first part of this gospel story. We have a creator. He made us. He has very good intentions for us. And he has very good intentions for the world that he made.

[17 : 55] In him, we find identity. We find purpose. We find our meaning. And our lives are meant to be lived in response to him. The gospel story begins with God as our creator.

As you discuss this in your groups, I would encourage you to challenge yourself and challenge each other. Does your story begin with God as your creator?