Ten years ago on this Sunday, we gathered in the aftermath of terrorism atrocities, and we came full of questions on that day: Are we safe? Will our borders be secure? Will society ever be the same? Will our economy falter? Will we ever bring to justice those who have persecuted us? Will this only grow worse? Is this the beginning of the end? We were full of questions.

Now ten years later we have some answers, and we have new questions, don’t we, because this world can be shaken. But though the mountains should fall into the sea, God will not be moved,¹ and on that Sunday after 9/11, I remember a moment of great power when we stood as we are now standing, and in the face of all the uncertainties of life, we proclaimed boldly that of which we are certain, just as we do today.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

¹ Psalm 46:1-3
In the Beginning, God’s Grace Was There

Part 1: A Big Star and A Bigger God

Reflections on Genesis 1:1

Father, we thank You that You are on Your throne this morning and that it is a throne of majesty and a throne of grace. We are thankful as we lift up the name of Jesus that You draw us unto Him this day. We thank You that You are the Creator of the ends of the earth, that You are from everlasting to everlasting, and that all we see, and all that exists, had a beginning point.

But what we cannot fathom is that You had no beginning and no end. We are like little children and we are baffled by these things, and yet You have given us evidence upon evidence of them, and the heavens are telling of Your glory.

We thank You, Father, that You have deposited within us the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing our inheritance in the saints and assuring us that we are Your children, and if children, then we are Your heirs, co-heirs along with Christ Jesus Himself.

We pray today that You would be magnified in our eyes and that You would join Your Word to miracles that You intend to perform.

We pray all this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Are you ready for some good news?

Today’s good news comes in the words of one of the greatest saints ever was at Reynolda, a woman named Alice Rogers, who has been in Heaven for some time now. Alice said, We have a BIG God! Every Sunday she would walk out that door and she’d give me a hug. I would look in her eyes just to be reminded, and to make certain it was still true, she’d tell me again:

We have a BIG God!

It is my aim to speak from Genesis one, two and three in a series of upcoming messages, and today we will start in Genesis chapter one, verse one. In the beginning, the genesis, the beginnings, we see that God’s grace was there. The Gospel isn’t something that was new and appeared on the scene when Jesus came. Instead, Jesus was the fulfillment of the Gospel that had been announced from the beginning.

A JUST AND MERCIFUL GOD

The Story of the First People

In Genesis chapters one, two and three, we see that God created for Himself a people, Adam and Eve, and He had closeness and fellowship with them. He gave them life-giving words of instruction: Eat of the fruit of any of the trees of the Garden, except of the fruit of the tree in the middle, lest you die, and yet the human beings in fellowship with Him broke their fellowship by cause of disobedience.

But God provided a way to be just, that is, to keep His word that there would surely be death if they ate of the tree in the middle of the Garden, and yet at the same time to be merciful. He slew animals, and with the skins of the animals He covered the nakedness and the shame of Adam and of Eve.

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2 Hebrews 8:1
3 John 12:32
4 Psalm 90:2
5 Psalm 90:2, 93:2; Isaiah 57:15; Jer 10:10; Dan 4:34
6 Psalm 19:1, 97:6; John 9:8-9
7 Romans 9:16-17; 2 Cor 5:5; Eph 1:13-14
8 Genesis 3:15; Luke 24:25-27; 1 Peter 1:10-12
9 Genesis 2:16-17
10 Genesis 2:25; 3:7-11, 21
Our Story

Later, as the story continues, we see that this is our story, because God continued to make a people for Himself. You who once were no people have become my people.\(^\text{11}\)

He called Abraham up out of Ur of the Chaldees and He made a people. He fellowshipped with His people; He communed with His people; and He had closeness with them. They hungered to hear from God and He gave them a word, life-giving instruction, through Moses, a lawgiver.

Yet the people fell into disobedience. But when they did, God again provided a way to be faithful to His own word for the consequences of disobedience, and yet to be merciful. He gave them a tabernacle,\(^\text{12}\) then a temple,\(^\text{13}\) and He instituted a system of sacrifices by which they could bring innocent animals, place them upon the altar, and as they were slain, their blood temporarily covered the guilt of the people.\(^\text{14}\)

And so God once again created a people, had fellowship with the people, experienced their disobedience, and continued to be just and yet show mercy.

And the story is recapitulated in many different scenes throughout the Old Covenant until the fullness of time, when God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to do something so extraordinary that it was beyond what any angel or archangel had ever imagined He would do;\(^\text{15}\) He Himself came as the gift and the sacrifice.\(^\text{16}\) God made a new people for Himself by offering up the life of His only begotten Son as the penal substitution and the full sacrifice for all of our sins.\(^\text{17}\) And by that sacrifice, He was able to do a miracle in anyone who would believe in Him: They would have the right to become a child of God,\(^\text{18}\) not modified or improved, but made new.\(^\text{19}\)

God made a people for Himself through Jesus Christ, and from that time He has had fellowship with His people through the Holy Spirit, Who abides inside every believer.\(^\text{20}\) And yet, as believers we still stumble into disobedience, and God still maintains His justice, but the penalty for our disobedience continues to be put upon Jesus Christ, and our sin is cast as far as the east is from the west.\(^\text{21}\) God continues to show us mercy.

This God of ours, Who is rich in mercy,\(^\text{22}\) has shown us that He is the Creator God Who longs for fellowship with His people, and that when we disobey, He can be just and yet show us mercy.

Today we look at Genesis one, verse one:

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

THE VASTNESS OF CREATION

A n astronomer and a theologian were friends and they were talking to each other one day. The astronomer wasn’t a believer and he said to the theologian, It seems to me you could sum up all of your Christian belief by saying that God is love. Is that correct?

This God of ours, Who is rich in mercy, has shown us that He is the Creator God Who longs for fellowship with His people, and that when we disobey, He can be just and yet show us mercy.

\(^{11}\) Hosea 2:23; Romans 9:23-26; 1 Peter 2:9-10

\(^{12}\) Exodus 25:8-9; 26-27; 35-40

\(^{13}\) 1 Kings 5-8; 1 Chron 22:6, 28:11; 2 Chron 2:1-7:11

\(^{14}\) Exodus 40

\(^{15}\) 1 Peter 1:12

\(^{16}\) Matt 20:28; John 1:29, 36, 3:16; Eph 2:8; 1 Peter 1:19

\(^{17}\) Isaiah 53:5; Romans 4:25; Galatians 3:13

\(^{18}\) John 1:12

\(^{19}\) 2 Corinthians 5:17

\(^{20}\) John 14:15-18; Rom 5:5; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 4:13

\(^{21}\) Psalm 103:12

\(^{22}\) Ephesians 2:4
He is a BIG God!

The theologian didn’t answer him back. Instead he just said, *It seems to me you could sum up all of astronomy in just saying twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder...*

Astronomy is continually revealing the vastness of creation. God is a great big God and we are realizing the universe is bigger than we ever imagined. Perhaps you have seen Louie Giglio’s presentations. If you haven’t, you will want to find on the Web or on DVD his presentation about the stars and the vastness of God, from which I share some amazing information.

The Whirlpool Galaxy

The Whirlpool Galaxy is sitting out perpendicular to us and so the Hubble telescope has provided some outstanding views of the Whirlpool, only 31 million light years away from where we are sitting now. A light year is how far light travels in a year, which is the equivalent of 5.88 trillion miles, and it travels at 186,000 miles per second. So when God created all that exists, He began by saying, *Let there be light*, and however that light was generated from the word of God, it was traveling 186,000 miles per second! Now, thirty-one million light years is difficult to comprehend, but if you want to travel to the Whirlpool Galaxy, all you have to do is get onto a light beam and travel 186,000 miles per second for 31 million years and you would arrive there.

The Whirlpool is one of hundreds of such galaxies that is estimated to have a hundred billion stars.

Big Stars

Our Sun

To put everything into perspective about stars, our own star, the sun, is an average-sized star. It is a million times the size of the earth, 93 million miles away, and 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit on the surface. Louie Giglio says that if you consider a golf ball to be the earth, then our sun would be fifteen feet in diameter by comparison to the golf ball, about the distance of my arms stretched out twice, AND our golf ball-sized earth would fit into that 15-foot in diameter sun about a million times. For further perspective, a million golf balls would fill up a school bus. That is a picture of our sun, a medium-sized star.

Betelgeuse

Another star in our galaxy is commonly called *Betelgeuse*. Betelgeuse was thought to be 427 light years away from the earth, but NASA now tells us its distance is about 600 light years. It is twice the size, not of our sun, but twice the size of our earth’s orbit around the sun. And if the earth were a golf ball, Betelgeuse would be the size of six Empire State Buildings. You could put 262 trillion earths inside the Betelgeuse star, or, with our earth as the size of a golf ball, you could fill up the Superdome with golf balls, three thousand times.

He is a BIG God!

Mu Cephei

The Mu Cephei star is 3,000 light years away. If earth were a golf ball, the Mu Cephei star would be by comparison the size of two Golden Gate Bridges end-to-end. You could fit 2.7 quadrillion earths inside the Mu Cephei star. Now, a quadrillion is a very hard number to get your mind around. Even our national debt doesn’t help you!

To put this number into perspective, a quadrillion is a thousand trillion. If we first break this down into millions – something we can conceive of – we can think of a million seconds ago, and that would be twelve days ago. A billion seconds ago would be three decades ago. A trillion seconds ago – try to wrap your mind around this – would be somewhere around 29,000 B.C. And a quadrillion seconds ago would be roughly 30 million years ago. And you could put 2.7 quadrillion earths inside the Mu Cephei star.

23 Genesis 1:3

But the Mu Cephei is not the biggest star that we have discovered.

**Canis Majoris**

The largest known star that we have discovered through Hubble is called aptly, *Canis Majoris*, which I think means, the Big Dog star, (literally, *The Great Dog*) star. And the Big Dog is so big that if the earth was a golf ball, then in comparison, Canis Majoris, the Big Dog, would be the height of Mt. Everest, six miles above sea level. You could put seven quadrillion earths inside of the Canis Majoris star, which in our comparison would mean the number of golf ball-sized earths that it would take to cover the entire state of Texas twenty-two inches deep!

*We have a BIG God!*  

We don’t know how big the universe is. We don’t know. But in the beginning, God created it all.

**GOD CREATED**

It is interesting that Genesis 1:1 is one of the most debated verses by linguists, scholars and theologians because there is a technical decision that has to be made about whether that initial clause is independent or dependent. Some scholars say it should be translated, *When God began to create*. Others say it should be translated, *In the beginning, God created*.

But after all the scholarship is said and done, the majority report that the best translation is what most of you have in your Bible, *In the beginning, God created*.

This translation is reinforced by the fact that one of the most interesting verbs in the Hebrew is used in Genesis one verse one. It is the word *bara*, which means *create*, and there are two peculiarities about the word *bara*.

**THE One Who Created**

The first peculiarity is that in the Bible there is no other instance of the word *bara* being used with any other subject except for God Himself; every time that this word for *create* is used in the Hebrew language, God is the subject. No one else but God can *bara*.

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*God is the Creator because He is THE One Who can make something out of nothing. If you meditate upon this, it will transform your notion of life.*

**Everything from Nothing**

The second peculiarity about the word *bara* in the Old Testament, is that wherever it appears, there is no mention of the materials that were used, only the product that was produced. The reason for this is that *bara* is a unique word that belongs only to God because, although it is difficult for us to conceive of, only God is able to create out of nothing. We are able to take wood and make furniture; we are able to take metal and make a car; we are able to take paint and make a masterpiece; but we cannot make something out of nothing. God is the Creator because He is The One Who can make something out of nothing. If you meditate upon this, it will transform your notion of life.

This all-important meditation of our hearts, right here in Genesis one, verse one, *In the beginning, God created* ... is to say that God did not need any help to form the creation, and He also didn’t need any substance or thing in order to form it.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says there is nothing new under the sun, and from a natural standpoint that is true. Water may exist in a lake; then it may evaporate and exist in a cloud; then it may precipitate and exist in the rain; it may freeze and exist in the snow. But there is no new water! And energy might exist through the sun’s rays; it might exist in fossil fuels hidden underneath the ground where it has been stored; but it is not new energy. Nothing in this world is new in and of itself.

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25 Ecclesiastes 1:9
NEWNESS

BUT, in the beginning, God did something that was totally new. He created, and this is to say that there is always in God’s being the capacity for newness.

New Life for That Which Is Dead

It means that He has a life-giving force. He is able to speak and bring about life in the first place, and He has a resurrection force. He is able to give life to that which is dead, to bring life to where there is no life. When Jesus was raised from the dead, He wasn’t resuscitated; it wasn’t the recovery of His heartbeat. God gave new life to His body. And God promises us a resurrected life in Christ, the possibility of something that is totally, radically new. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. A creative work of God takes place in the spirit of the redeemed.

Not of Ourselves

This is such good news to us because it means that you do not have to give God something to work with in your life in order for Him to create something which is new and beautiful. He does not need any of the resources that you have. He doesn’t need money; He doesn’t need materials; He doesn’t need suggestions; He doesn’t need extra time; He doesn’t need good thoughts; He sure doesn’t need sacrifices; He doesn’t need food; He doesn’t need any other resource in order to do something new, because new, by its very definition, means that it did not previously exist. No existing condition is necessary for God to do His creative work because in the beginning, God created. He is the Creator, He is THE One Who does new things.

Only By Faith

Isaiah prophesied, Behold I am doing a NEW thing. It springs forth. Can you perceive it? Can you perceive it? Faith rises when our spiritual eyes become attuned to the reality that in the beginning, God created. When we perceive that God has the capacity to do something new, that is faith. It does not mean that you bring anything to God, not your righteousness or any other offering, nothing except spiritual eyes that believe God. And believing God – having faith – comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

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

Called Into Existence

He is God because He can call into existence something that does not exist.

Romans 4:17b: as it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations’—in the presence of the God in whom he [Abraham] believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Hebrews 11:3: By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible

In the beginning, God created, and God especially likes to create when there is nothing there. Nothing.

When His people were slaves in Egypt, they had no way out, and they had no plan to offer God as a solution. They had nothing. But God sent a deliverer with signs and wonders and His people walked out of Egypt.

When His people came to an impassable body of water, and behind them was an invincible army, they had nothing. They had no way. But God opened up the Red Sea for His people to walk through on dry ground.
In The Beginning God's Grace Was There

Part 1: A Big Star and A Bigger God: Reflections on Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created... Thrice

When His people were hungry in the desert, they had no food. But they awakened and found

When God appointed a prophet to go to a valley where there was nothing but dry bones and said, Prophecy to the bones, there was no flesh. There was no life. There was no heart. But God said, Behold I do a new thing. It springs forth and buds.

When Jesus was to come, God started the whole adventure by sending an angel to a teenage girl named Mary, who had no baby. She was betrothed but had no husband. There was no procreative process going on in her body. But God said, You are going to be with child.

1. John 21:1
2. Exodus 16:14-35
3. Ezekiel 37:1-10
5. Matthew 8:24-27; 14:22-33; Mark 4:37-41; Luke 8:22-25

When Jesus began His ministry at thirty years of age, He was attending a wedding party. And His mother said to Him, Jesus, they have no wine. They had none. They were out of wine. And so His first miracle was to make wine where there was none.

We see this in Jesus. He liked those moments. If He could find somebody who had been blind from birth, who had no eyesight, and had never had any eyeball, who had no connection of their eyes to their brain, who couldn't see, who never had seen anything, He would love a moment like that. He would give sight where there was no sight.

He loved to find those who had no hope and to make them into mighty men of faith. He liked that.

And so, after He was raised from the grave, in one of His key moments – He must have really enjoyed this – He was standing the beach and He realized that the disciples had been fishing all night. He hollered out to them: Have you any fish? And they said, No. We've been fishing all night. We have no fish.

And so He said, Cast your net on the other side of the boat. They did, and their nets were bursting.

I always wondered if it was because Jesus knew there was a school of fish on the other side of the boat, or if He created the fish and put them in there just in time. It matters not, because He is the One through Whom all things were made. He is the Creator. That means that the creation and all of its creatures, that I belong to Him. That means that the creation and all of its creatures, that you belong to Him.

He is the Creator. That means the creation and all of its creatures belong to Him.
God is committed to your redemption; God is committed to your salvation;
God is committed to your security;
God is committed to your blessedness;
not because you are wonderful, righteous or good,
but because you belong to Him.
He would not allow that which He made
to be destroyed.

This Fall we are going to do as we always do, as we have done for a decade or more. We will go to the Dixie Classic Fair. And we, meaning our kids, will have entered art exhibits into the fair. Every year we win ribbons and there are cash prizes that are associated with these, so it’s a big deal.

The first moment we arrive on our first day at the Dixie Classic Fair, we don’t go to the roller coaster, or to the booths that sell cotton candy, fried Snickers bars or even fudge. We go to the Exhibit Hall to see if anybody has won any ribbons, whether they be blue, or red, or yellow. We walk past all the other precious things, because we don’t care much about them; we are going to look for our own stuff, our kids’ stuff.

So we walk up and down the aisles, and although every entry has a little tag with the artist’s name, we don’t need to look at the tags – which we can’t read anyway because they are too far away – we just look at the work of art. That is how we know which one is ours. The kids know what they have created. The artist knows his work. It is his work. And so we look and say things like,

Look Abigail! There is your cat! It won a red ribbon! Fantastic!

Then we go to the next one and say,

Look! There is your other multimedia project!
Look at that. Oh, it is so beautiful. It is wonderful!
Why didn’t it win a ribbon? Those judges are lousy.
Look at them. How could they have given a ribbon to that one over there? And then we squint our eyes and realize it was a church member who won it. Oh, it’s pretty good. It is pretty good! This really happened.

In other words, what you create belongs to you. We have elaborate laws set up to enforce just that. If you invent something, get a patent. It belongs to you. If you write something, copyright it. It belongs to you.

And so it is with God. The Creator has the rights to that which He has created! This is my Father’s world.38

The most important thing that we are longing to know today is not whether our bank account is going to be secure, and not whether there are going to be anymore terrorist attacks; not whether our kids are going to turn out all right; and not whether the marriage is going to make it. Our greatest longing today is to know for a certainty, Do I really belong? Am I utterly secure for eternity?

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and therefore all that He created belongs to Him. If you want to understand the creation, you must understand it as that which God Himself has created. It stands in some senses in distance from God, but at the same time always belonging to God. And even when the creation is frustrated by its own sin, God does not abandon His creation, because it is His.

His Redeemed

Here is the good news of the Gospel: God is committed to your redemption; God is committed to your salvation; God is committed to your security; God is committed to your blessedness; not because you are wonderful, righteous or good, but because

38 Psalm 24:1-2
...you belong to Him. He would not allow that which He made to be destroyed.

Instead, He sent His only begotten Son to die in your place and to take on Himself your penalty, because you are destined to belong to Him. There was no measure that was too great for God to redeem His world. And so as surely as the message of Genesis one is that the creation belongs to the Creator, here is the message of the Gospel:

When you accept what Christ has done for you, bringing no resources of your own to God, but simply believing that God has loved you so much that He died in your place and to take on Himself your penalty, because you are destined to belong to Him.

There was no measure that was too great for God to redeem His world. And so as surely as the message of Genesis one is that the creation belongs to the Creator, here is the message of the Gospel:

When you accept what Christ has done for you, bringing no resources of your own to God, but simply believing that God has loved you so much that He died in your place and to take on Himself your penalty, because you are destined to belong to Him.

And once you belong to God, there is nothing in Heaven or earth – there is no angel, no demon, nor principality that could ever separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

And every word of the Gospel is designed to assure the saints that you are now and eternally secure in God through Jesus Christ.

You are not an orphan. You belong to God and you cannot be plucked out of His hand. Therefore, you may live your life as a life of faith, and life becomes an adventure. Life becomes a place where you can move forth with confidence because you know that no matter what you go through, you belong to God.

That is why one of my favorite stories is about the little boy who makes a little wooden sailboat. He goes down to the lake’s edge and sails his little boat each day by the shore. One day a wind comes and blows his little boat out into the middle of the lake and he loses sight of it. He runs around all the borders of the lake, but he cannot find it.

Every day the little boy looks for his boat until one day he is walking through the downtown of his home city, and there in the window of the dime store...
NEW LIVES

A New Joy in Surrender

There is a joy that is appreciated and released by the power of the Holy Spirit. It comes when we recognize that the Christian life is not a religious attempt to hold onto God, but is an adventure that is secured and assured by the promise of God that He will not let go of the ones whom He created and recreated through Christ. God is holding onto us, and therefore, the full surrender of our lives becomes not a burdensome, toilsome act of religious labor, but instead the glad joy of our lives.

A New Way of Seeing Life

And when you have a picture of the vastness of Who God is and all that He has done in this created order, then it changes the way you see life. There becomes a deep sense of satisfaction that everything is a gift in the first place. He created every air molecule that I breathe, so every breath is a gift from God. Every day is a gift from God, and every day therefore is a cause for rejoicing because there is a gift in it, and I am the steward of the good gifts of God.

A New Expectancy

When you see the gift of God in His created order, life becomes filled with an expectancy. Even when you go through your most difficult times, your heart and your mind can remain focused on, In the Beginning, God created, because it means that everything is possible.

There is newness. You belong forever to the One Who created you. And this day, this day, every day, is a cause for rejoicing.
Therefore I say,
Rejoice in the Lord always!
Again I will say, rejoice! 46

In the beginning, God created.

And THAT is the Gospel!

Amen.

Father, we are so thankful today that You are the God Who created Canis Majoris, a single star that is so big this beautiful earth could fit into it 4.7 quadrillion times. We cannot put our minds around that. But we are even more thankful that You, our Creator, are even bigger than that, and we are twice Yours.
Thank You, God, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

He is a great BIG God, and there is nothing that is impossible to Him. He is beyond our comprehension. He made the Big Dog Star, and all of the other hundreds of billions of them, so there is nothing that is too difficult for Him. And instead of spending our lives trying to figure out the problems that we can’t understand, the invitation of the Gospel is spend your life meditating on the vastness of God and what He has created.

May the Lord God bless you and keep you and be kind and gracious to you and make His face to shine upon you and give you peace.

Amen.

46 Philippians 4:4
Sharing the Light Ministries

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