

Introduction

I begin with a story. A group of friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night, one of the hunters returned alone, staggering under the load of an eight-point buck. **"Where's Harry?"** one of the friends asked. **"He had a stroke of some kind and is a couple of miles back on the trail,"** the hunter replied. **"You left Harry laying there, and carried back the deer?"** the friend queried. **"Yes,"** the hunter answered, **"I figured no one would steal Harry."**

There's a guiding principle of human life that the hunter either didn't grasp or grasped but didn't follow. We should put first things first and that's what I'm going to preach about today from Genesis 1:1.

In the Beginning

Notice the Bible's first words, **"in the beginning."** They reveal a fact. The universe had a beginning. It did not exist. Then it existed.

That's what verse 1 says but many highly regarded scientists today disagree. This past February, two noted researchers published a widely discussed paper that presented a new model for explaining the existence of the universe. I'm not going to explain the model but just share the general conclusion it draws. Astrophysicist Brian Koberlein defines what that is: **"The model predicts that the universe had no beginning. It existed forever as a kind of quantum potential before 'collapsing' into the hot dense state we call the big bang."** Hear that conclusion again. **"The universe had no beginning." "It existed forever."** Many scientists, Stephen Hawking being one of them, believe that.

But they're categorically wrong. The Bible begins by declaring that the universe isn't self-existent and eternal. On the contrary, it came into being. It was not. Then it was. It had a beginning in other words.

God

Now let's look at the fourth and most important word in the Bible,

“God.” It’s no accident, I believe, that the subject of the first sentence in the Bible is **“God.”** This whole chapter, Genesis 1, indeed, the whole Bible, is about Him first of all.

Genesis 1 reveals two facts about Him. One is that He’s a living being with the highest possible powers of consciousness and activity. He thinks and acts without limit. A second fact is that He’s utterly good. There’s nothing bad in Him or about Him. Genesis 1 reveals, in other words, that an utterly great and good God exists

Not everyone believes that of course. According to the Barna Research Group, about 11% of Americans are either atheists or agnostics. That’s 33 million people. The word atheist means **“no God.”** Atheists believe that He doesn’t exist and never has.

But they’re fatally mistaken. It’s a fact of our existence that when we act contrary to reality, things go poorly. And the more important the reality, the more poorly things go. We can infer from Genesis 1:1 that a great and good God is the foundational reality upon which all other realities rest. Consequently, it’s literally catastrophic to live as if He isn’t that or worse, as if He doesn’t exist. It simply ruins life.

If you and I want to live well, we must begin here with the subject of the very first sentence in the Bible. We must know that an utterly great and good God exists and then think and act accordingly.

Created

We come now to the words, **“the heavens and the earth.”** They refer to the universe and everything in it. Let’s think for a moment about the number of atoms in the universe. It’s generally accepted that it’s **“One Hundred Quinquavigintillion,”** which is 10 followed by 80 zeroes. Those atoms formed into elements, molecules, compounds, and so on are the **“the heavens and the earth”** of verse 1.

Notice what verse 1 teaches. God **“created”** them.

Secular scientists disagree. Quantum theory now contends that an elementary building block of matter popped into existence out of nothing without cause. Theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss, for instance, wrote

a bestselling book titled *A Universe from Nothing*. He postulates in it that laws of physics enabled the matter that became the universe to pop into existence out of nothing without cause.

But verse 1 makes it clear. Laws of physics didn't create the universe out of nothing. God did. "**Created**" means that He conceived every detail of everything that exists and spoke/willed it into existence. So, He invented the incredibly complex molecular mechanisms in Adam and Eve's eyes and willed them to exist and work as they did.

We know the truth. The universe didn't pop into existence out of nothing without cause. God thoughtfully created it instead.

First Things

Those then are the three facts that Genesis 1:1 reveals. The universe had a beginning. A great and good God exists. And that God created the universe. Now let's apply good logic to those facts and draw a valid and life-altering conclusion from them.

Doing that begins with a critical observation about verse 1. It implies that there are two kinds of reality.

One is "**the heavens and the earth**," the universe and everything in it. They represent what Paul called in 2 Corinthians 4:18 "**the things that are seen**." They are visible material realities, ones that we can perceive and know through our senses. Look at these power point slides. What do you see with your eyes? It's an attractive person and an unattractive person. Appearance of body is a visible material reality.

A second kind of reality is "**God**." He represents what Paul called in 2 Corinthians 4:18 the "**things not seen**." They are invisible spiritual realities that we can't perceive through our senses. They include living beings: God first and foremost and then angels, Satan, and demons.

But "**things not seen**," as Paul made clear in that text, include more than spiritual beings. They include facts that relate to those spiritual beings that we can't perceive and know through our senses. We only know them because God reveals them to us in His written word the Bible. Psalm 147:10 together with 1 Peter 3:4 illustrate what I mean.

They reveal a fact that we can't perceive through our senses. Inner beauty of character impresses God. Outer beauty of body doesn't.

Those then are the two kinds of reality. One is the visible material realities that we can know through our senses. The other is the invisible spiritual realities that we can't know through our senses. Let me ask you a life-defining question in that regard. Which are the more important realities? Are they the visible or the invisible ones?

Genesis 1:1 tells us. It reveals that God alone had no beginning. Everything else, in both the visible and invisible worlds, did, being created by Him. That implies two facts. First, God is self-existent (has the power of being within Himself). Everything else, including Satan, is existence-dependent. Second, God is infinite, limitless. Everything else, including Satan, is finite, limited. Those facts mean God is a separate and superior kind of reality. He's utterly unique – the only one of His kind. So, He has no equals or opposites. Satan, for instance, isn't His opposite as many believe he is. In truth, he's far more like the slug in our garden than he is like God.

The implication is crystal clear. God is the dominant of all realities. The importance of no other reality even begins to approach the importance of Him. That tells us something about any facts that relate directly to His nature and acts. They are the most important facts.

Now, notice something about God and those most important facts. We can't perceive them through our senses, which leads us to the conclusion we draw from Genesis 1:1. The most important realities in our universe and lives are invisible.

Let's consider beauty again. Visible reality – Outer beauty of body impresses people. Invisible reality – Inner beauty of character impresses God. Since God is creator and people creation, the invisible reality is the most important. Thus, it's better to be this (power point slide of ugly person) with inner beauty than this (beautiful person) without it.

That illustrates the simple but dramatic conclusion we draw from Genesis 1:1. The most important realities in our universe and lives are invisible ones.

Put First Things First

That's the conclusions and if we're wise, we'll direct our day-to-day lives pursuant to it. We do that by putting first things first. "**First things**" refers to the most important realities. To "**Put first**" means to give priority. Since the invisible realities are the most important, we give them priority. Giving them priority is a two-step process.

First, we learn what the invisible realities are, beginning with God, and descend into the particulars or details of them. Recall a brief statement I made earlier. We only know the invisible realities because God reveals them through His written word, the Bible. So, we study the Bible and learn as many of them and their particulars as we can. God is the most joyous being the in the universe. Followers of Jesus never die. God forgives us in the same measure that we forgive others. Aging is a process of gaining not losing. Sex is a reflex and testimony of the Trinity. God measures generosity by how much we keep not give. The baby growing in the womb is the handiwork of God. And the Holy Spirit intercedes with us when we pray. Those are just samplings of the invisible realities the Bible reveals. We learn them and their particulars or details. That's the first step in putting first things first.

The second step is to live out the implications of the invisible realities. In all the activities, experiences, and events of day-to-day life, we think about, perceive, interpret, desire, value, decide, act, or react as their implications direct us to.

Invisible reality: God works all things out for our good if we love Him. **Implication:** We are beyond harm in His hands. **Application:** We don't panic or fret when things go wrong.

Invisible reality: Inner beauty of character or soul impresses God. Outer beauty of beauty does not. **Implication:** Inner beauty trumps outer beauty. **Application:** We value, pursue, and reward inner beauty over outer beauty. We marry or hire for character not beauty, for instance.

Invisible realities: Every person on earth is in God's image, is loved by God, and is an immortal. **Implication:** Every person on earth is

priceless. **Application:** We do our best to make our every encounter with every person one of goodwill and respect.

Invisible reality: To die is gain. **Implication:** Disciples of Jesus are better off dead. **Application:** We anticipate death not dread it.

Invisible reality: Sex is a reflex of the Trinity. **Implication:** Every sex act reflects poorly or well on the Trinity. **Application:** We make the degree of physical intimacy with someone match the degree of relational commitment, with intercourse reserved for marriage.

You get the idea. We put first things first. We live our day-to-day lives as if the most important realities are the invisible ones.

Something supernatural happens when we do. As we increasingly integrate our lives into the invisible spiritual world of God, they increasingly takes on the substance of that world, which is love, joy, and peace. At the same time, they increasingly transcend the substance of the visible material world, which Aldous Huxley described as monotony, poverty of soul, and pain. We are suited spiritually, psychologically, and bodily to live in the spiritual world. We do that by putting first things first, which begins with the "**first**" of all "**first things**," vigorously engaging God and His kingdom at hand.

Conclusion

The esteemed preacher and teacher Haddon Robinson came across an old recipe for cooking rabbit. Listen to what he observed about it. He declared: "**It starts out, 'First catch the rabbit.' The writer knew to put first things first.**" He was right. We can't cook the rabbit without first of all catching it. That's the call of Genesis 1:1. Let's catch the rabbit. Let's live as if the most important realities are the invisible ones. Let's put first things first.