

## **“The First Issues” Genesis 1:1-5**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today is the second Sunday of our *First Things First Campaign* and I’m going to preach about *The First Issues*. I mean the ones that come first in sequence before all the rest that we’ll discuss in our campaign.

I want to introduce those issues to you by asking you a question. What is the foundational belief of our faith? Christians would give different answers to that question. Some would argue that it’s the deity of Jesus. Others that it’s the virgin birth and perfect life of Jesus. And still others that it’s the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But they’d all be wrong. Don’t misunderstand me. All of those things are fundamentals of our faith. They’re non-negotiable and beyond compromise. But none of them is the foundational belief. That’s because we have to believe something else in order to believe them. That something else is the foundational belief. We see what that belief is in the passage I read earlier, Genesis 1:1-5.

### **IN THE BEGINNING**

Let’s start with the first three words in the Bible. They are not *“in the big inning”* as the old baseball joke goes but *“in the beginning.”*

Those words reveal that the universe came into being. It did not exist. Then it existed. It had a beginning in other words.

Many modern scientists disagree. They believe that the universe had no beginning. They boldly declare that the idea that the universe had a beginning is dead. It is an article of blind religious faith, against all the scientific evidence, they say.

Years ago, I talked with a secularist, a biologist, about this. He said the idea that the universe had a beginning is absurd. *“Think about it,”* he said, *“You’re saying that something came from nothing and everyone knows how ridiculous that is.”* To which I replied: *“But think about what you’re saying. If the universe always was, then non-living matter is self-existent and eternal and everyone*

*knows how ridiculous that is."*

My point was this. The idea that the universe had a beginning is no more difficult to believe than the idea that it didn't.

Anyway, the very first truth that the Bible reveals is that the universe and everything in it had a beginning.

## **THE FIRST ISSUE**

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 very first sentence in the Bible is "God." That fact is that He dominates this whole chapter. The word "God" is used 32 times in the 31 verses that make it up. This whole chapter, indeed, the whole Bible, is about Him first of all.

Here in the fourth word of the Bible, we have the foundational belief of our faith. That belief is that God "is there" as Francis Schaeffer said it. He actually 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 most people, including us, disagree. We believe that God exists. We believe that He is a living being, independent of the universe and everything in it including us.

That is the foundational belief of our faith. It's foundational because we have to believe it in order to believe everything else. We can't believe in the deity of Jesus, for instance, unless we first of all believe in a deity, God. Or we can't believe in the resurrection of Jesus unless we first of all believe in a God who could resurrect Him.

Now, you can see from that what the very first issue in life is. Is God there? Does He exist? That issue is first in terms of sequence. If we get it wrong, then we'll most certainly get everything else wrong. But if we get it right, we are then able to get everything else right as well.

All of us, I hope, have gotten it right. The fourth word in the Bible

says that God exists and we believe it.

## THE SECOND ISSUE

We now come to the remaining words in verse 1. Those words tell us what the God who is there did. He *“created the heavens and the earth.”* *“Heavens and earth”* refer to the universe and everything in it. Think of it this way. The universe and everything in it are made up of atoms. And God created them all. Consider this in fact. All the atoms that make up our bodies right now were made in the “beginning” of verse 1. Look at your hands. God created all the atoms that comprise them in the “beginning” of verse 1. The atoms that make up your hands, in other words, are at least 10,000 years old. You ladies might want to rub some extra hand lotion on yours after hearing that. Anyway, verse 1 reveals that God created everything that exists.

The rest of chapter 1 then goes on to tell us how He did. He formed and filled. He formed things on days 1 through 3 and then filled the things that He formed on days 4-6. The very last verse, 31, then sums up all of those things together this way, *“It was very good.”*

With all of that in mind, listen to what Paul writes in Romans 1:20, *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen through what has been made.”* Do you get what Paul is saying? What God did and made here in chapter 1 reveals some of His attributes, qualities, traits, or whatever you want to call them.

That verse shows us what the next issue is that follows naturally from the first. The first is, *“Does God exist.”* We’ve already answered correctly, *“Yes, He does.”* The next issue then is, *“What is He like?”*

Genesis 1 answers that partially. It reveals at least four qualities or traits of His - powerful, intelligent, personal, and good.

Let’s examine the first of those, for instance. He is powerful. Imagine all the power in the universe put together. God must have at least more power than that since He created it. Passages in the Bible tell

us that He has all power in fact, infinite power.

Think about the implication of that. It means that nothing is too difficult or hard for Him to do. He can do anything as easily as anything else. Everything that He does is without effort or strain. He never expends any energy or power at all that needs to be replenished.

Remember the narrative in Joshua for instance - about God making the sun stand still for a day. That required the earth to stop doing two things - rotating on its axis and orbiting the sun. That's a mind-boggling thing, which is why a man I know of claims it didn't happen. Ironically, he does believe in God. *"But that's impossible,"* he says.

No, it isn't impossible. God is all-powerful. Nothing is too difficult for Him. He can do anything as easily as anything else. Watch me take this pen out of my pocket. Making the earth stop rotating and orbiting was easier for God than taking this pen out of my pocket was for me. He expended less of His energy and power, which are infinite, doing what He did than I expended doing what I did.

That's just one of the astonishing qualities or traits of the God who is there. He has many others that I will identify in several weeks. Dallas Willard sums up His qualities this way. First, He is utterly lovely. He has every positive quality of character that it's possible to have without limit or flaw. Second, He is utterly competent. He has every positive ability that it's possible to have without limit or flaw.

Those then are the first two issues in human life and their resolution. #1 – does God exist. Yes, He does. And #2 – what is God like? He is utterly lovely and utterly competent.

### **THE THIRD ISSUE**

Those two issues make way for the third. The third is the most pressing personal issue in our lives and it's this. Which should we regard and treat as more important – God or what He created?

We do need to realize something. What He created has a distinct advantage in that regard. That advantage is that we can perceive it with

our senses. We can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch it. God, on the other hand, has a distinct disadvantage. That disadvantage is that we can't normally perceive Him with our senses. We can't see, hear, smell, taste, or touch Him. The created world, in other words, is an overwhelming presence. God is a subtle presence.

The created world, as a result, seems much more vivid and real to us than God does. It is an overwhelming presence of which we're acutely aware. He's a subtle presence of whom we're only faintly aware.

Think about our own morning experience for instance. We haven't eaten for 8 or 10 hours and wake up famished. Our stomach is growling as we say it and appropriately so. It demands to be fed. So, we soon hear the delightful sounds and smell the delicious aromas of coffee brewing and bacon and eggs frying. All of you wives are up and at 'em early, I'm sure, making that kind of breakfast for your husbands. Anyway, at that point, the created world is an overwhelming presence. Most of us, therefore, are far hungrier for food than we are for God.

That is just a microcosm of most people's whole life experience. That is the way that their lives generally run. Their spouse or children or profession or hobby or financial problem or illness or sex – and not God – is the overwhelming presence in their lives. All of those things are much more vivid and real to them than He is.

And because they are, they regard and treat them, not Him, as being more important. They think and act as if they, not He, are paramount. They think about and engage them far more vigorously than they do Him.

But they shouldn't. Genesis 1 and the whole Bible make it crystal clear. God is the dominant reality of the universe. He is objectively and infinitely more important than anything in it including the people we love most. He is in fact more important than everything in it put together. Just study Genesis 1 and you'll see what I mean.

That shows us what our calling is. Regard and treat God as more important than what He created. Think and act as if He, not it, is paramount. Think about and engage Him more vigorously than it.

That is our calling but we will never answer it unless something happens first. That something is that God has to become as vivid and real to us as the created world is. He has to become as vivid and real to us as our loved one or our hunger or our illness or our sex drive is.

One of the acknowledged leaders of our Valley is our model for this. I'm talking about Jay Alford. Most people think that what defines Jay is what he has achieved. But that, as impressive as it is, isn't it and I mean at all. I've come to know the past 12 years what defines Him. It's the fact that God is as vivid and real to him as the created world is.

And because He is, He's paramount to him. Jay regards and treats God as more important than the created world is including his wife, children, work, and even his own life. I've said before that the one thing that people value the most is staying alive on earth. Jay doesn't. I've seen it. He actually thinks and acts as if God is more important than he staying alive on earth is. It's a rare thing.

Jay illustrates what our calling is. Do what we have to do so that God becomes as vivid and real to us as the created world is. Then regard and treat Him, because we're able to, as more important than it.

## **CONCLUSION**

That raises a question in closing. What do we have to do so that God becomes as vivid and real to us as the created world is? The answer is "several things." I'll explain those things in some detail in two weeks and in much more detail in our *First Aim* study on Wednesday nights.

One of the most critical of those things is found in Psalm 16:8. David writes, "***I have set the LORD continually before me.***" That's one thing we have to do – set God continually before us. Keep Him before our mind as much as we possibly can. Can you imagine anything better than God to keep before your mind? No!

So, do it! Learn how to keep God continually before your mind among other things. Then do what you learn. He'll eventually be as vivid and real to you as the person beside you is.