

Series: Created | Sermon 1: In the Beginning | Text: Genesis 1.1

Not sure if you realize this but last weekend was actually a landmark for Mercy Church. They say it takes 3 years from the time you plant a church to establish it and get to a place where you are standing on your own so to speak. Well I want to take a moment to thank the Lord Mercy Church because last weekend was our 3 year anniversary!! And far beyond establishing a church I believe the Lord is stirring up a movement and I'm pumped to be a part of it with you! We've seen a great deal of excitement in the early days of our church. But listen I know you may be newer to our church or maybe you've been here a while but find yourself being an observer right now. Listen we believe discipleship happens not through observing but through participating. That your desire for hope & for God to do something in your life...his answer to that is participating in a messy group of people called the church. The way we say it is that discipleship happens in relationships.

So here's what we are doing. Today we are beginning a brand new sermon series that will last for 6 weeks. We are going to look at the first 3 chapters of the bible and here's my challenge to you. If you fit into that observer category: It usually takes about 4 to 6 weeks to figure out if a church is for you. Sometimes you can know in one week if its NOT for you, but if you think *maybe* then you need to give it a fair shake. So we've built a 6 week window for you. You'll get to dive into 3 of the most important chapters in the bible. Read them, take notes

on them & just dive in. Then, test out a community group. You can join one today after service and that's where you can talk about how the things we cover actually apply in your life. Come to starting point this Friday night and meet our leaders. find out more about who we are and why we do what we do.

Ok, get your bibles and open them to PAGE 1. This weekend we are beginning a sermon series called "created" where we will be looking at the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. And over the course of these six weeks we are answer the simple question: What were you created for?

Here's WHY: It is the most fundamental and important question in life, and Most people don't know how to answer it. They aren't sure if they have a purpose, and if they think they should have a purpose, they don't really even know where to find it. Your life purpose... that creates self-confidence because I know who I am, It creates courage to take risks because I know where I'm supposed to be going, it relieves anxiety in big decisions, It helps me know the type of person to marry, what to spend my free time on, what to spend my money on, who the influences in my life should be.

Listen in our world right now we are confusing the ideas of
purpose - what am I created for...and
passion - what am I excited about...what my soul craves.

Throughout this series I'm going to show you that when your purpose comes first, your passions will grow naturally out of that in a healthy way. And you'll be able to flourish in them. Purpose is the deeper question. And it must come first.

BUT if you don't know your purpose, what happens is your passions start to become your purpose. And that creates people who are zealous for any number of things that will never satisfy them. Yesterday I'm coaching my youngest daughter's first soccer game ever. First game: IF we would have kept score, we would have lost 17-0. And that's because the other coach pulled back. Ya'll if I don't know my purpose in life...I can let my passion, my soul cravings, turn me into a wild-eyed crazed soccer dad who will push his daughter to do 2-a-days at 4 years old because we WILL NEVER BE EMBARRASSED LIKE THAT AGAIN. You are like, that's an exaggeration...IS IT? REALLY? 4 kids playing sports and gymnastics and dance...I've seen things.

Now, if I do that: she may grow up to be the next Mia Hamm. IS THAT HER CREATED PURPOSE?! And is it MY created purpose to live through my kid? You say no. Well, WHAT IS MY PURPOSE? Because if I don't know it, my life will be driven by one passion or another. If my soul craves approval at work...then I'll give my life to work. If my soul craves approval of friends...high school students listen to me...if my soul craves acceptance of others then I'll do whatever it takes to get LIKES. BUT IS THAT YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE? TO BE LIKED? NO you would say...but do you know what your purpose is?

Because if you don't then those soul cravings will become your purpose. Which, I believe, is the very thing the great enemy we meet in genesis wants to happen. He convinced the first humans to follow their passions - desire to be as powerful as God - instead of their purpose - to know and walk with God. And it brought about their destruction. And he's still up to that today.

We are going to spend 6 weeks answering the question What is your purpose. What are you created for? Because when you get that fundamental question right, you can make sense of who you are, and how you are meant to engage the world around you.

That's what we are in Genesis. The title is just the translation of the first three words "In the beginning." Our author is Moses, the guy that led Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Now having left Egypt and all their temples and pantheism that explained the world as the gods' playground, Moses puts forward a clear, definitive understanding of how the world really came to be and what our purpose is in it.

So let's jump in. Today we are going to cover two whole verses. I'm going to do my best to try and take us slowly through this but I feel a bit like a tour guide trying to help you see the beauty of Van Gogh's starry night. To really understand it you can't just take a passing glance. Art historian Erwin Panofsky said to understand art you have to take 3 steps: look, see, and think. And Genesis, especially chapter 1, is kind of like that. Because it is deep deep truth...communicated in the form of a narrative. A story you can tell your children.

So I implore you as we get into this majestic passage of scripture...study it. Spend time observing it and then thinking well about how your created purpose in light of it.

Ok Genesis 1.1 you ready? Let's go. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. - Genesis 1.1

Ok let's stop right here. John Sailhammer who is one of the great OT scholars of the past 100 years said of this verse "These 7 words are the foundation of all that is to follow in the Bible." Those of you doing quick math, the baller OT scholars count in Hebrew.. Let's go through them and if we have time, we'll get to verse two. You English majors can identify that the subject of Moses' opening line about the world is...God. This is huge and its our first point today. *If you are newer to Mercy, I try to give you take away points from the scripture. Think of it like the art expert trying to help you see what Van Gogh was doing in his painting.*

The book of Genesis, and the rest of the bible, is about God.

Listen, in chapter one the name of God, Elohim, occurs 35 times in all! Moses is trying to make a point! GOD said let there be light and there was. **God** said let there be plants and there were. **God** saw that it was good. **God** created every winged creature of its kind and then **God** blessed them. GOD GOD GOD. This whole thing is about GOD.

And this little truth is massively important when you read the bible. You can either read the bible as how God

is a part of your story or how you are a part of God's story. And I think its really healthy for us to see that we are only given one day out of 6 in GOD'S creation story. See if you read the bible to figure out how God can help you, you are not looking for your purpose & you are not going to see it. You are looking for God to aide you in achieving your passions. How can God help me? But that's not what the bible sets out to do. The bible from the very first sentence is telling you that the main character of the universe, and the main character in your life is GOD and not you. And that is disorienting. I've told you before this is like when Nicolaus Copernicus discovered that the sun didn't revolve around the earth...but that we, on earth, revolved around the sun. We weren't at the center. That took a long time to adjust to and that may be what you need to take home and really spend time with. I was thinking how this could be a prayer you pray this week to help you approach God rightly and maybe it would sound like this: "God you are not a part of my story, I am a part of your story."

That's the first clue in figuring out your purpose. to know what you were created for, you need to know who you were created by. Part of your created purpose is knowing God. So our main goal in this first sermon is trying to see who this God is at the center of everything. So let's talk about who this God is, starting with that phrase in the beginning God...

Exploring this phrase led me to marvel at God this week. The phrase means the beginning of time itself. This isn't just the beginning of earth, but the beginning

of all time. And what we are supposed to see is that in the beginning...God was already there. There are a few times today where I'm going to say the phrase God is _____ . In doing so what I'm trying to introduce you to the God who is, the bible claims, the main character of your story. Because if you are going to know what you are created for, you gotta know who you are created by. And this first one is that God is eternal.

Moses also wrote Psalm 90. The only Psalm we have from Moses. And in it he says
2 Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world,
from eternity to eternity, you are God. -- Psalms 90:2 (CSB)

Whichever way we look - all the way back in time or all the way ahead to the end God is there. And because he exists outside of time he is fully aware of what has happened and what will happen. Which has major implications for our lives. We talked about this when we went through Psalm 90 back in January.

I told you Jen Wilkin wrote a great book called None Like Him where she said God has given time-bound humans a longing for timeless-ness. We act like we are going to live forever. We want to live forever. Why did God give us that longing? To torture us? No. He does it to give us the opportunity to trust him in very personal ways.

If you trust God with your past, it doesn't have to define you - You don't have to re-live past hurts

because you can find the power to forgive in the one who has forgiven you. Living in the present hope of the gospel can heal you from the pain of the past. I've got friends going through counseling right now and you better believe that at the core of their hope is that if they can, down in their heart, hand their past over to God then what they are left with in the present is what GOD says about them. And their purpose gets determined by what God says instead of being determined by what someone else did to them or said to them. Ya'll that's huge! You can't just "LET IT GO." Your past is like a boomerang. You let it go and after a while its going to come back around and hit you in the face. You have to give it to someone who can heal you from it.

If you trust God with your future, you can be free from worry. For me, this means freedom from the fear of what will come. I told you - glass half empty guy. I need to control all the variables because I'm certain the future is going to be a disaster. And God says whoa whoa whoa. Spence your whole life span is a really tiny blip. CHILL OUT MAN. I'm way more powerful I have way more experience and I will be here long after you are gone. So chill.

Ok that's just one thing I want you to see about God here at the beginning.

Here's the second observation about this God and maybe the most obvious one today: Next phrase: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth

The famous Stephen Hawking, who has been called the most brilliant theoretical physicist since Einstein, said that our galaxy is about 600 trillion miles across. Swirling around like a pastry roll. He says “we now know that our galaxy is only one of some hundred thousand million that can be seen using modern telescopes, each galaxy itself containing some hundred thousand million stars. And each of these galaxies are an estimated 3 million light years apart.” And on top of all that, Hawking says the universe is expanding. AND he says...he doubts a big bang was how it all started. It demands a more complex beginning. When the bible says God created the heavens and the earth I need you to see he did not create small & simple. He created VAST ENDLESS SKIES AND he created every atom.

Our next truth is simply: God is Creator. Moses’ words here have great force. He’s in the exodus wandering in the wilderness and every night he has the night sky to look up at. The milky way, the random comets. No wonder he wrote Chapter 1 like poetry. He was in AWE that there was this omnipotent creator who created all of this by just speaking. AND THIS creator at the same time CARED enough for his people to free them from slavery. And

Kent Hughes said it this way: OH How we need to rise above the congestion and smog of our existence and see our Creator, our cosmic caregiver. How does this connect to your purpose? It means you HAVE A PURPOSE! God is not an accidental God. There are no mistakes. Isaiah 40 says

[25] “To whom will you compare me, or who is my equal?” asks the Holy One. [26] Look up and see! Who created these? He brings out the stars by number; he calls all of them by name. Because of his great power and strength, not one of them is missing. -- Isaiah 40:25-26 (CSB)

The one who cares enough...and is powerful enough...to count every bajillion katrillion stars...says he created you on purpose. For a good purpose Ephesians 2.10 says.

I know you may be here as a skeptic or atheist today. Listen I hope you will consider what we are saying and I hope you’ll investigate it and vet it. We’ll get into how God created the world when we walk through the creation account I think next week. But if that’s you, I want you to consider God is creator in light of this next one.

Let me show you another even MORE IMPORTANT, MORE AWE-INSPIRING TRUTH about this God.

Ok get this...if God existed before the beginning...then that means that while he is creator, he is not FIRST a creator. Creating was something he eventually did. But he was something before he was a creator and he was doing something before he was creating. WHAT WAS HE DOING? Ok you ready for this. We find our answer at the climax of Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17. He says

24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory, which

you have given me **because you loved me before the world's foundation.** -- John 17:24 (CSB)

Here is Jesus saying in eternity before time, before this story began...God who he calls "father" was loving him. Before God was a Creator, he was a father. In fact this is your next attribute of God I want you to write down: God is a Father. Here's why that matters:

If God is first a father, it means that everything he does, including creating the world...he does in a fatherly way. When we see that God rules over his creation as a kind and loving father, then we can actually delight in his providence.¹

See if God's first identity is a creator, which he is a creator but if that is his first identity, then it means he needs a creation to rule over in order to be who he is. And THAT has all kinds of problems. God *needs* us? That seems like a pitiful God. But not only that, if God's first identity is as this ruler over his creation, what kind of salvation does he offer me if I break his rules? He lets me off the hook.

Michael Reeves in his fantastic book *delighting in the trinity* said that would mean we would relate to God more like a divine traffic cop than anything else. So if he lets me off the hook...I can have GRATITUDE for him, and that gratitude might be deep, but my affection stops there. I will never LOVE the traffic cop. Which is ironic because the greatest commandment in scripture is to LOVE the Lord your God with everything you have.

¹ Reeves, Michael. *Delighting in the Trinity*. 23-24.

Why do I spend time here? Because I believe the REASON a lot of Christians and a lot of other people flirting with spirituality and religion get frustrated when they try to practice their faith is BECAUSE THEY feel they are trying to keep the TRAFFIC COP HAPPY. And that is exhausting! So you try and do enough good to outweigh the bad but the whole time you are really just hoping the traffic cop doesn't throw you into eternal jail. YOUR PURPOSE is greater than appeasing a divine traffic cop because GOD IS MORE THAN THAT!!

And so we MISS OUT! Before he ever created, before he ever ruled the world, this God was a father loving a son. And then listen the scriptures start to use the term God and Father interchangeably.

- In Exodus he calls Israel his firstborn son.
- In Psalm 103 he says "as a father has compassion on his children so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."
- Isaiah 66 ..Isaiah prays "you are our FATHER."
- When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray...he didn't say Our Creator who art in heaven. Our Ruler who art in heaven. Those things are true. But no...Jesus was teaching us about how we are to relate to God and he said pray this way "our..FATHER!"

Listen: a good father doesn't just want his kids to obey. He wants his kids to be joyful, to be so confident and certain of his love that his commands are a delight to

them. That they want to spend more time with the father because they feel safe with him and he dotes on them and they feel overwhelmingly LOVED by him. This makes the Christian God vastly unlike any other God.

It's why John says in 1 John 4.8 - God is what...he's love. His nature is loving. Because for all eternity he's been a father. Which means the son is eternal. If you look at the first 2 verses and the beginning of the 3rd verse I want to show you the Christian God. If you look closely what you are going to see is all three persons of the singular Christian God.

[1] In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [2] Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. [3] Then God said...

If you are counting two plus the word said and wondering what that's about, John 1 begins with

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created -- John 1:1-3 (CSB)

The word was Jesus. Right in the opening verses you see the Christian idea of the trinity. That one God exists in three persons. Let me say it this way today and then we'll get into it when we talk about mankind: God is three persons yet one essence.

Which is MIND BLOWING. And I know this sounds crazy at the moment, but the fact that God is triune will have MASSIVE implications for your purpose in life.

And ONE of those is that God didn't create us because he needed us. He didn't create us because he was lonely. He had the son and the spirit. God exists eternally in love.

Preview: And if he created us in his image, then our lives will never be complete until we are living in love and community with others. God created our lives to only work when we are in deep community with others. If you look at your past, or maybe your family's past... how different would it have looked if you had been in loving community with others? I KNOW community groups are messy but its WORTH IT. The alternative is isolation that leads to destruction.

God wasn't lonely. He created us as an overflow of his love. So that his love might be enjoyed by others. His love with Jesus is the blueprint for his love with us. This is why Romans 8.29 says

29 ...that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. -- Romans 8:29 (CSB)

God enjoys showering love on his son and God enjoys loving us through his son! I desperately want you to rest in this truth: God is a father, and he deeply loves you who he calls his child.

Now listen: for some, God as father is creates emotional connections that are unpleasant because your father or

father figure wasn't good to you. I'm sorry. It wasn't supposed to be that way. Let me give you this hope: God the Father is not called father because he copies earthly fathers. He is not some pumped up version of your dad. It's the other way around. HE is the one all earthly fathers are supposed to reflect. And some dads do that better than others but all dads fall short. I plead with you to look behind the reflection to your heavenly father, God himself.

In fact that leads me to the last point for today. It's verse 2. It's the one verse that I had to read a few times to make sense of. Look at it again:

[2] Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

The Hebrew expression formless and empty is a common expression used to communicate uninhabitable. Which is the very opposite of what would exist after the six days of creation. Spread over this uninhabitable earth was darkness which emphasizes the emptiness. And under the darkness was the deep. Why would God include this for us? I think its to foreshadow how he can work in each of our lives. The Spirit of God is there hovering above ready to get to work. And then when day one comes, God starts to bring beauty and order and purpose out of darkness and emptiness. This is our God.

² Kent Hughes, 22.

³ The idea of the re-creation work of Jesus as word comes from J.D. Greear's message "In the beginning" preached at The Summit Church in the series "The Whole Story" in January of 2016.

God is redeemer

He can see through darkness. He breaks through it with the light of Life. That's what Jesus is. The light of life.

[6] For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. -- 2 Corinthians 4:6 (CSB)

"Just as the Spirit of God hovered over the dark waters, so he hovers over dark hearts of humanity, preparing them for the word of God that will make them new creations in Christ."²

Jesus, the Word, is re-enters a dark, sin-filled, chaotic world and brings life and light to it again. ³This is what we see Jesus doing in his life and ministry right?

- He cures diseases - making the lame walk & the blind see
- He calms the storm - bringing order to creation when it is in chaos
- He brings the light of life to sin - he forgives adulterers & thieves and when he does they transform. Zacheus the thief becomes generous.
- He raises the dead.

But then, at the end of his life. Jesus himself is put into the darkness and chaos. Middle of the day darkness fills the sky and when he dies the earth shakes. What is happening? Jesus, the word, is thrown into the darkness and chaos created by our sin so that we could have light and life again. He allowed himself to be killed on the cross so that you and I could be re-created in the resurrection.

Your purpose...what we are after in this series...it begins with knowing this God. Then you

Is your life being destroyed by sin right now? Maybe your family is unraveling, or your addiction is raging again. The darkness is taking over. If you turn to God by faith in Christ he can make you a new creation!

What he does is he takes the word you've rejected and begins to fill you with it again. Seeing change may take time but it will happen.

Let me close:

Genesis is here to introduce you to God. He's the reason you are created. Do you know this God?

To know him you must allow his word to recreate you.

- You can receive his offer of salvation today.
Today.

The world we currently live in is replacing deep thinking with shallow, reactionary thinking.

It's the big question. If you knew, with 100% certainty, WHY you were put on the earth...that would put everything else in your life into perspective. You'd be able to assess every decision from who you marry to what you do for a job to what you spend your free time doing. Every decision would be directed pretty clearly.

And my hope for you is that you get lost in the awe and grandeur of God. Cause he is really big in these three chapters. Then, with him in view, you will get to see the source of all Christian thought. Answers to why the world is the way it is, what our purpose in life is, what we think about the environment, about justice, about gender & sexuality, about work, and where our hope for the world comes from. All good Christian theology has its starting point in these first three chapters. And so we are going to do our level best to try and walk through them and I believe as we do God is going to connect some dots for many of you.

Maybe you've bounced around in the bible some but have never really seen how it all connects. I think you'll see it in this series. It's gonna be awesome. It's tough to put a big idea around this series because so much comes out of these 3 chapters and I don't want to boil down majestic truth into a soundbite. BUT, I will say there is a storyline that begins here and becomes THE storyline of the bible.

God created you for a good purpose, he loves you, and he wants you.

That's the bible's story and There is a lot of hope for you in it. today we gotta talk about God. God after all is the main character.

Every religion, every form of spirituality, has some idea of God. And everything else about that belief system is based on what it has to say about the nature of God. God is the starting point & the center point. This is true of ALL people. Every human believes something about God that drastically impacts how they live.

- If you believe in one supreme God, you believe your life decisions should line up with that God
- If you believe in many gods, you have to appease those gods the right way so that they will make things go well for you on earth.
- If you believe there is no god, then you set your own course for your morality and ethics in this world.
- If you believe god is a giant lizard named ZORP, then you build a campfire and play flutes on the day you believe he is returning to destroy all mankind.

That's how POWERFUL the idea of God is. Everybody has a belief about God that shapes, maybe more than you realize, how you function in the world. The Christian message that begins in Genesis 1.1, begins by introducing you to God. We have 3 verses to

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. - Genesis 1.1

[2] Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

I want to show you what God is and why it matters that you see him for who he is.

1. Father
2. Singular
3. Triune
4. Eternal - John 17.3
5. Self-existent
6. self

To glorify someone is to praise, enjoy, and delight in them.