

And God Said: Genesis 1-3

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We finished the book of Romans last month. That was an extended sermon series over a couple of years, and I trust we're a stronger church because of it. For this coming year, I want to spend a lot of our time in the Old Testament. You remember at the end of the Gospel of Luke when Jesus was speaking to a couple disciples on the road to Emmaus. It says that "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). And the Apostle Paul, in Acts 20, says to the Ephesian elders, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." Those are inspiring examples for us to follow. We must recognize that the whole Bible is about Jesus, and it's important for us to have a growing understanding of the whole counsel of God.

We can't just focus on the New Testament, or just the Old Testament, or just the Gospels, or just the letters. We need to be attentive to all the diverse parts of Scripture which fit together to tell one story—the story of God redeeming a people for Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

It's wonderful to recognize this unity in Scripture. So even when we're studying the New Testament, we see how it harkens back to Old Testament events and themes. And when we're focused on an Old Testament text, we look for ways that it anticipates the coming of Christ or foreshadows Christ in some way. We never want to separate Scripture out in such a way that we miss the overarching storyline.

So in an effort to bring us along in a growing understanding of the whole counsel of God, the plan is to spend much of 2015 preaching through portions of the Old Testament. Starting in February I'll be preaching through the book of Joshua.

This month, I want to begin the year with 4 sermons on Scripture and prayer. Two sermons on God's Word, and two sermons on prayer. This is the bread and butter of the Christian life. For those who are trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of sin and therefore have a relationship with God through Christ, our ongoing relationship with Him involves hearing from Him (in Scripture) and talking to Him (in prayer). So I want us to give some thought to this at the beginning of a new year.

Many of us are probably familiar with the very first events recorded in the first book of the Bible. Genesis 1-3 tells us about God creating the entire universe out of nothing, and creating everything good. He gave Adam and Eve everything to enjoy, and yet they rebelled against Him, disobeyed His command, and thus sin entered the world.

This morning I want to look at just a few aspects of these events that teach us some things about God's Word. First we'll think about the power of the Word of God. And then we'll think about temptation and the Word of God.

The Power of the Word of God

First of all, think about the sheer power of the Word of God exhibited His act of creating the entire universe out of absolutely nothing. God created out of nothing. The very first words of the Bible make this clear. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Before that, nothing existed except God. There was no universe, no earth, no material reality whatsoever. And God created. Verse 3 gives a vivid example of how God spoke things into existence by the power of His word. God didn't have to labor and struggle in order to bring things into existence. He simply spoke, and there was. Verse 3, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." This is the God we serve. This is the One true and living God. The God who effortlessly and powerfully commands light into existence. Throughout chapter 1 of Genesis God gives these commands as He creates and orders His creation. Verse 6, "And God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters . . .'" Verse 9, "And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.'" Verse 11, "And God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit . . .'" Verse 14, "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night.'" Verse 20, "And God said, 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.'" Verse 24, "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds.'" God created all that is out of nothing. He commanded, and the universe came into being. Then He gave further commands, and the universe was formed and organized according to His good plan.

What do we learn about God based on the fact that He created this universe out of nothing? We know that He is sovereign over His creation. The power of His word displayed in creation reminds us that His word is still powerful today. He is in absolute control over His creation, not just at the beginning, but at

every moment. He can make the sun stand still, if He wants to, like He did for Joshua when the Israelites were fighting the Amorites (Joshua 10). God is in control of the sun and the moon, the weather and the seasons.

In addition to thinking about God's power, we're also reminded that our God is a God who speaks. He communicates. He reveals Himself. He did this most fully in the Person of Jesus Christ, who is actually referred to as the Word.

The Gospel of John in the New Testament begins in a way that is reminiscent of Genesis 1. This was read earlier in the service. Listen again to a couple of these verses.

“In the beginning [you hear the allusion back to Genesis 1] was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:1–3, ESV)

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, ESV)

This is the Incarnate Word. God communicates in His *written* word, preserved for us in this Book which we call the Bible. And He has also spoken in the *Word made flesh*, the Person of Jesus Christ. We should marvel that God has spoken, that He has revealed Himself so clearly, so compellingly, both in this Book and in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In addition to this, as we consider how God created the *physical* universe out of nothing, we should also praise Him because He can create *spiritual* life out of nothing. Paul makes this connection in 2 Corinthians 4:6, where he writes, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” What a rich verse, and what a rich analogy between how God created light out of darkness and how He creates light in our hearts. You see, before God works in our hearts, we have no inclination to believe in Him. Our hearts are filled with darkness, and our spiritual eyes are blind. Just a couple verses earlier Paul wrote, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (v. 4). That is the spiritual condition of unbelievers. No knowledge of God's true greatness. No delight in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No willingness to believe. No ability to believe. Just a hard heart

dead set against God, blind to His glory, blind to the joy that is found in Him. It's into that spiritual nothingness that God says, "Let there be light." And there is light.

If you're saved this morning, that's how you got saved. If you are trusting Jesus, it's because God created light out of darkness in your heart. He regenerated your heart. He gave you spiritual eyes to see His beauty. He gave you a heart that delights in Him. He freed your will from its complete bondage to sin. And now you love the Gospel, because God did this amazing work of creation in your heart.

Temptation and the Word of God

Skipping now to chapters 2-3 of Genesis. God placed Adam and Eve in this wonderful garden. He provided them with every good thing, every good pleasure. They enjoyed intimate communion with each other and with God. There was no guilt, no shame, no regrets. They had a beautiful existence, living at peace with God and at peace with God's creation. It was paradise.

Satan, in his pride and jealousy, was eager to attack this good thing God had created. Verse 1 of chapter 3 says "the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made."

The serpent approached Eve, and we immediately see his craftiness in a couple ways. First of all, he spoke to Eve rather than to Adam. Adam was intended by God to be the loving leader and protector. But Satan defied God's design and approached the helper rather than the leader. This was part of his crafty scheme to bring about rebellion. And Adam failed to live up to his God-given role, because we find out in verse 6 that he was with her. He was right there with her, and yet he apparently did nothing to defend God's Word or protect his wife from the lies of Satan.

The serpent was also crafty in the way he attacked God's Word. He began with a question. A cunning question. A deceitful question. A question designed to plant seeds of discontentment. He asked the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" What kind of question is that? God NEVER said, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden." In fact, what He actually said was, "You may surely eat of EVERY tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (2:16-17). Satan took God's good blessing and good command and tried to seduce Eve into thinking that God's instructions are overbearing and burdensome and restrictive. Satan misrepresented

God's Word. He twisted it, and the seed of temptation took root. Temptation comes through lies that contradict God's Word.

At first, Eve seemed to be defending God's Word, but even in her response it was evident that she had been affected by the serpent's deceitful question. She said, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" That IS what God said, right? Well, mostly. Although she changed a couple things, and those slight changes show that she was already beginning to doubt God's goodness and she was falling into Satan's trap.

Again, what God actually said was, "You may surely eat of EVERY tree of the garden." Eve left out the word "every." She left out that emphasis on God's goodness, that He had given them everything for their good pleasure. He lavished blessings upon them. But you can almost hear the tone of Eve's voice as she responds to the serpent. She didn't respond boldly, with a confidence in God's good Word. She didn't rebuke the serpent and say, "What are you talking about!? God said we could eat of EVERY tree in the garden." Instead, she responded half-heartedly, simply acknowledging that they can eat of the trees in the garden, but then over-emphasizing the prohibition. The other change she made was adding to the prohibition. In her restatement of God's command, it's not just that they can't eat of the fruit, but they can't even touch it, or they will die. God never said they couldn't touch it.

In Eve's response to the serpent we already see her being swayed by the devil's schemes. Instead of seeing God's "Yes," she is now focusing on the "No." Instead of dwelling on God's goodness to her, she is beginning to think of God as the One who gives burdensome rules. And the way this temptation came was by Satan tampering with the Word of God.

In stark contrast to Adam and Eve succumbing to this temptation, we read of Jesus in the wilderness standing up against Satan's temptation. Matthew 4:1 says, "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and He was hungry. Then the tempter came to Him. And just like in the garden, here in the wilderness Satan tried to use his crafty schemes to thwart God's good plan. But unlike the garden, Jesus responded with a bold confidence in God's Word. He quoted Deuteronomy 3 times in response to the three temptations. When the devil tempted Him to make bread out of stones, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that

comes from the mouth of God.” Jesus is modeling for us what it means to live in reliance on God’s Word. We must depend on God’s Word. We must fight temptation with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

In the second temptation Satan twists God’s Word, like he had done in the garden. He took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” Satan quoted Scripture. He quoted that from Psalm 91. The point of Psalm 91 is to TRUST in God, but Satan rips these verses out of context and uses them to justify TESTING God. Of course, Jesus saw right through this and responded with Deuteronomy 6:16, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Then, thirdly, the devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, if He would fall down and worship him. Jesus said, “Be gone, Satan!” and then quoted Deuteronomy 6:13, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”

Where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus Christ succeeded. He confidently depended on the Word of God, and when the flaming arrows of the evil one were unleashed against Him, He fought back with the sword of the Spirit. We can be grateful that Jesus has succeeded, not only where Adam and Eve failed, but where we too have failed. Jesus is the perfect One who laid down His life for those who are so imperfect. He is both the object of our faith and an example of faith. We trust in Him, and we’re also inspired to trust in the Word of God like He trusts in the Word of God. We find motivation here to fight temptation like He fought temptation.

This is the battle we’re in, after all. Satan tempts us. Sin tempts us. And the temptation comes in the form of a perversion of God’s Word. God’s Word is good. His Word is full of blessings and wonderful pleasures for us. But the temptation will always be to view His Word as restrictive rules. God doesn’t have your best interest in mind. He just wants to rain on your parade. He just wants to make you unhappy with all of His rules. “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” That’s how Satan and sin seek to drive a wedge between us and God’s good Word.

In the face of those temptations we need to dwell on the goodness of God’s commands for us. His instructions for us will NOT diminish our happiness. They will greatly INCREASE our happiness. Think with me for a moment about some of the

commands we read in Ephesians 5, for instance. Paul writes, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity and covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving” (Eph 5:1-4).

The fight of faith is the fight to remember God’s absolute goodness in giving us all of these commands. We need to fight against the urge to think of these as burdensome requirements. These instructions are here for our good. Sexual immorality brings sadness. It brings guilt and shame. It may be exciting for a moment, but it will leave you empty and miserable. Covetousness (wanting what someone else has), will likewise leave you discontent and unhappy. Instead, “let there be thanksgiving.” Be thankful for the blessings God has given. Rejoice in the instructions He has given us. The path to joy is the path that God has laid out for us in His Word. In this life sin will always be there to lure us away from God’s good Word by enticing us with deceitful pleasures. But true pleasure, lasting pleasure, is only found in obeying God’s Word.

Preach that to yourself this week, and every week throughout this year. We need to constantly remind ourselves of God’s goodness. We need to meditate on His Word, study His Word, memorize His Word, so that when the temptations come we’ll be able to take up the sword of the Spirit and confidently wage war against those temptations.

So at the beginning of this New Year I want to encourage you, and encourage myself, to make this a year of soaking up the Word of God, listening carefully to the Word of God, and being in awe of the power of God’s Word.

In closing I want to encourage you in a few very practical ways. First of all, have a plan. And it doesn’t have to be an overly ambitious plan. Just have a plan. Andrew put together a great blog post last week with a bunch of different Bible reading plans. Some are plans to read through the whole Bible in a year. That may or may not be what you want to tackle for 2015. Even if you have the discipline to do all of those daily readings and get through the whole Bible, you may be more interested in reading less, but reading more slowly and thoughtfully through various portions of Scripture. Take a look at the many plans that folks have put together. Maybe you’ll choose one of them, or maybe they’ll spark an idea of your own for how you want to structure your

Bible reading for this year. Whatever it is, have some kind of plan. Don't just say, "Yeah, I'm going to read the Bible more consistently this year," but then when Monday morning rolls around, you don't know what you're going to read, and then you end up reading nothing. A clear plan will help to motivate you.

For those of you who are into technology, there are a lot of great helps out there that you can put onto your phone or tablet. There are Bible reading apps and podcasts. If stuff like that can be a help to you, avail yourself of those resources as well. For instance, there's a podcast that reads the daily Bible portions for one of the ESV reading plans. In 10-15 minutes a day, you could listen to the whole Bible in a year.

My next practical encouragement to us as we look to God's Word is to search His Word for blessings, for promises. This is not a textbook merely to be studied like any other book. It is God's living Word to us, filled with hope and nourishment for our souls. We should be on the lookout especially for things that will spur us on to hope in God.

George Mueller has some great statements on this. Mueller was a great Christian man who lived in England in the 1800s. He was a pastor and evangelist. He ran an orphanage which cared for thousands of young people. He started dozens of schools. He was a man of much prayer and much faith and much productivity. One of the fundamental things he discovered in his spiritual journey was the need to ransack God's Word for promises, for hope, for joy.

Listen to how he put it. He's speaking to younger believers here, and we can all count ourselves as younger believers as we sit at Mueller's feet to learn from him. He says,

"Now in brotherly love and affection I would give a few hints to my younger fellow-believers as to the way in which to keep up spiritual enjoyment. It is absolutely needful in order that happiness in the Lord may continue, that the Scriptures be regularly read. These are God's appointed means for the nourishment of the inner man. . . . Consider it, and ponder over it. . . . Especially we should read regularly through the Scriptures, consecutively, and not pick out here and there a chapter. If we do, we remain spiritual dwarfs. I tell you so affectionately. For the first four years after my conversion I made no progress, because I neglected the Bible. But when I regularly read on through the whole with reference to my own heart and soul, I directly made progress. Then my peace and joy continued more and more. Now I have been doing this for 47 years. I have read through the whole

Bible about 100 times and I always find it fresh when I begin again. Thus my peace and joy have increased more and more.”

Let this be an encouragement to us. Have a plan. Don't read haphazardly, but systematically and diligently. He also speaks of the importance of really meditating on what we read.

“I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it. . . . What is the food of the inner man? Not *prayer*, but *the word of God*; [he's not diminishing the importance of prayer at all, but saying that we need to hear from God first and foremost, and then prayer will flow from that] and . . . not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.”¹

A third encouragement is to link together the intake of Scripture with prayer. Mueller said that the food of the inner man is not prayer, but the word of God. But then prayer will come as a response, as an overflow of our hope and trust in God's Word. This is the daily conversation we are to have with God. Listening to Him through His Word, talking to Him in prayer. So as you read, pray. Talk back to God—not in a disrespectful way. But talk to Him as He is speaking to you. Praise Him for His great acts throughout history. Thank Him for His blessings. Ask Him for help in the things that are burdening you today.

And finally, take time not only to read Scripture, but also to memorize it, so that you can really use the Word as a sword, so that you can use it in the most intense moments of battling temptation, when you might not be looking at a Bible. We need to hide God's Word in our hearts. We must know it well, even word for word, so that we can see through the deception of Satan and sin. The twisting of Scripture will cause the temptation to grow stronger. The twisting of Scripture will make the sin seem justifiable. So we need to know God's Word and cling to it.

As we begin 2015 let's commit ourselves afresh to being a people of the Book. Let's encourage one another in this. It's not merely a duty to beat ourselves over the head with, or to beat anyone else over the head with. Rather, it's a delight to commune with the God of the universe in His Word. The individual described in Psalm 1 is a person who delights in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. That's the passage we'll look at next Sunday.

¹ Quotes taken from John Piper's biographical talk on Mueller's life.