

## God Is First

A Message for Trinity Evangelical Free Church of Teaneck, NJ

Sunday, September 12, 2019

By Phillip Brainerd, D.Min.

### Introduction

Today, we're beginning our series, "Life Answers in Genesis". Life is full of important questions. You have questions – Your friends have questions – The world has questions. Where do you go to find the answers? To start, let's ask an important, life question:

### *What came first, the chicken, or the Egg?*



I attended a party a long time ago, where someone asked that question. The question is intended to be a rhetorical question: There's not supposed to be an answer. The purpose of the question is to say, "There are some things where you can never know the answer." The person at the party who asked the question said, "You can't have a chicken without an egg, and you can't have an egg without a chicken". *He apparently thought himself to be very clever.*

You know something? There *is* an answer to that question -A definitive answer.  
***And knowing the answer to that question is surprisingly important.***

The answer is found in the Bible. Now, of course, we will move on to more serious questions, but stick with me for a bit.

Let's start by reading what may be the best-known sentence in the Bible:

Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

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

I always like to be fair to the folks who prefer different translations. Here is our verse in another popular translation, the English Standard Version:

Genesis 1:1 (ESV)

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

When I was a brand-new Christian, my pastor liked a translation called the New American Standard Bible. Here is our verse in that translation:

Genesis 1:1 (NASB)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

So, we have shown proper respect to various translations. Apparently, in the original language, this is a very straight-forward sentence. There is nothing difficult about it. For such a simple set of words, you would be surprised how much information this sentence contains. What do we learn from this simple sentence? Let's find out.

We're going to break our talk today into two parts:

- 1) The Facts
- 2) The implications of the facts for the world.

## **I. The Facts**

### **A. God is First**

As we get into this, I am suggesting five concepts or sentences that will appear throughout our series. Here they are:

- God is First.
- God is in control.
- God knows what he's doing.
- God is good.
- God cherishes me.

Do these sentences perfectly summarize the Bible or the Christian life? No.

-But, they're a pretty good start.

I have faced a lot of challenges in my life, like many of you. Knowing those five things have gotten me through a lot of those challenges. For now, let's talk about the first one: The fact that God is First.

We just read: "In the beginning, God..."

So, God is the first thing we hear about in the bible. He's first. He just is.

We've all heard those words so many times, we don't really think about it. But, have you ever stopped to ask, "beginning of what?" Before God created the universe and everything in it, there wasn't anything else.

-Just God.

Philosophers and theologians refer to this as "eternity past". Other than God, there was nothing else.

Because of this, we make an even more fundamental statement.

## **B. God is.**

The Bible starts with the assumption that God exists. It never argues the existence of God – it just constantly states that he is. When Moses first spoke with God in the burning bush centuries ago, he asked God for his name:

Exodus 3 (NIV)

13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

When Moses asked God for his name, God just said, "I AM". "I exist". *God is.*

Now, there are people who believe who don't believe that. They are called "Atheists". That means, "No God." The Bible speaks about those people on two occasions.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Ps 14:1 NIV)

”

As far as the Bible is concerned, only a foolish person would suggest that there is no God. Here's the other time that the Bible discusses these people:

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps 53:1 NIV)

And once again, let's make sure we hit important translations:

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Psalm 14:1 ESV)

The writers of the Bible did not see the need to prove the existence of God. *The writers of the Bible saw the need to tell us about him.* The purpose of the Bible is to instruct people who want to seek truth. People who don't want to seek for truth are simply considered to be foolish.

Now, this seems a bit harsh, right? Why do the writers of the Bible make such a seemingly mean charge against atheists? We'll get back to that when we look at the implications of the facts for the world.

Let's move on to our next point:

### **C. God is Creator**

"In the beginning, God created..."

So, once again, beginning of what?

-The beginning all matter in the universe. God created "ex nihilo". It's important to understand that this is different than any other ancient views of the universe. All other ancient thinkers said that the universe always existed. Everything came out of it by unknown mechanisms. Only the Bible teaches that God existed before his creation and made all the things in his creation out of nothing.

Now, science says something very interesting here: Without matter, without the stuff of the universe, *there is no time*. You need matter, or "stuff", to have time. Not only was there no "stuff" in eternity past, there was no time. So, when God created the universe, it was the beginning of all matter. It was the beginning of all "things". When God created the universe, he created time.

Even more important than all of this, *we believe that God created everything with a plan*. History is sometimes called, "His Story". So, we can talk about scientific things like matter and time. *But, most important - "the beginning" was the beginning of God's Story*. Writer J.R. Tolkien, the author of "The Lord of the Rings", described God as the "ultimate storyteller". We are part of that story.

There are things we should learn by just looking at God's creation.

The creation is full of power

- So, we should know that God is all-powerful

The creation is immense.

- We can see that God is infinite – he's bigger than his creation.

The creation is complex and intricate.

- It's not just big: It's a system of interworking mechanisms.
- The moving pieces of a single microscopic cell put the best watchmaker to shame.
- From this, we can see that God is all-knowing and all-wise.

The creation is beautiful

- God is artistic – he is an artist who loves beauty.

As we bring together all these facts, we can see one last thing.

#### **D. God is Glorious!**

Psalm 19:1 (NIV)

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

You can't look into the heavens without seeing the glory of God. At the other end, you can't look at the smallest micro-organism without seeing the glory of God. God is glorious, and his glory is expressed all over his creation.

The Presbyterians include this in their training of all young people and all new Christians. Their shorter catechism includes this question:

Question. What is the chief end of man?

Answer. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

***Because God is first, and because God is glorious, our chief purpose is to glorify him.***

So, we learn some very important Facts from the first sentence of the Bible.

- A. God is First: He just is. There was nothing else before.
- B. God is: His existence is assumed, never argued.
- C. God is Creator: And, He created with a plan.
- D. God is Glorious: Because God is first, our main purpose is to glorify him.

So having discussed the facts about what we learn in the first sentence of the Bible, let's move on to the second part of our discussion today.

## II. The Implications of the Facts for the World

Back to our initial question: What came first, the chicken or the egg? After reading the first sentence of the bible, we know the answer to the question. God is first. He created the first chickens. They laid the first egg. There, you go.

Here's the point:

*You can have neither chickens nor eggs without God.*

As I said, there are some much more important questions for the world. As promised, here is where we move on to those important questions. Questions like:

- Where do we come from?
- Do our lives have meaning and purpose?
- Are we special in the universe?
- What does the future hold?
- How should we run our world?

Are those better questions?

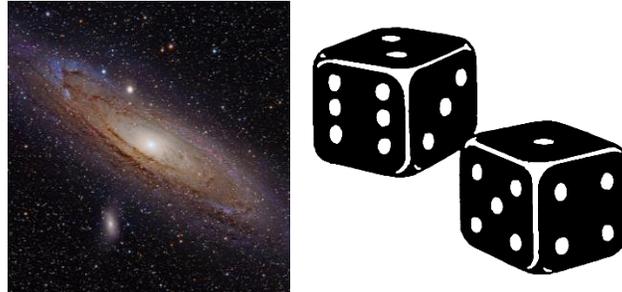
Before we can answer those questions, we need to revisit a point we made in the first section. We stated that it's foolish to say, "There is no God". Why is that, and why is it important? It's important because there are only two ways to look at the universe and where it came from. I can not tell you how important it is that we all understand this. Here's what C.S. Lewis says in his wonderful book, "Mere Christianity".

"Ever since men were able to think, they have been wondering what this universe really is and how it came to be there. And, very roughly, two views have been held. First, there is what is called the materialist view. (my note, screen just says "... here) People who take that view think that matter and space just happen to exist, and always have existed, nobody knows why; and that the matter, behaving in certain fixed ways, has just happened, by a sort of fluke, to produce creatures like ourselves who are able to think. By one chance in a thousand something hit our sun and made it produce the planets; and by another thousandth chance the chemicals necessary for life, and the right temperature, occurred on one of these planets, and so some of the matter on this earth came alive; and then, by a very long series of chances, the living creatures developed into things like us. The other view is the religious view. According to it, what is behind the universe is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know." (C.S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity")

So, Dr. Lewis is saying that there are two types of thinking for our universe. 1) What he calls "Materialistic". That means the only thing that matters is the matter, or the "stuff" of the

universe. Also known as atheism. 2) Then there are the “religious”. In other words, those people believe that there is an intelligence is behind the universe.

Let’s see if we can put this in its simplest terms with our next illustration:



We’re looking at dice, along with an image of the Andromeda Galaxy. Dice are a symbol of chance. To the person who says there is no god, the Atheist, the Materialist, our whole universe is nothing more than a grand roll of dice. Everything is chance; nothing more.

Now, again, the Bible says that this view is foolish. We can demonstrate why with the next set of images:



You’re looking at a child’s toy: Legos. Legos are little building blocks made of plastic. If you work with children, you easily recognize these pieces. In fact, you’ve likely stepped on them when children leave them on the floor.

Let’s say you walk into a room, and you see something like the picture on the left. Someone has taken a box of Legos and spilled them out on a table. You come back a few hours later and see something the picture on the right: a beautiful little house.

***Question: What is the normal explanation for how random Lego pieces became a house?***

***Answer: The normal explanation is that an intelligent being put them together.***

Now, it's possible that the pieces became a house by chance. If you put the pieces in a box and shook it for a long, long, time, you might eventually get a house. However, it's also possible that shaking the pieces for such a long time would result in lots of broken Lego pieces.

***Of the two explanations, it's much more likely that an intelligent person came along and assembled the Lego pieces into the beautiful little house.***

When the Atheist, the Materialist, looks at the universe, they say it could only have come about by chance. For some reason, they choose to ignore the obvious: that the normal explanation for something of this size, complexity, and beauty is the presence of an intelligent being who created it. The Bible says that's foolish. I, for one, agree.

Why is this important for the world? It's important for two reasons.

First, how does someone change from an atheist, who makes foolish choices to someone who believes all the things that we just learned?

-That God is first, that he is, that He is the creator of the universe, and that he is glorious.

Here's what Jesus Christ said:

John 3:3 (NIV) "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The Bible describes the inhabitants of this world as blind. Along with blindness comes foolishness. For this to change, God must, in his grace, create new life in us. We must be born again. That's why the writer of "Amazing Grace" said, "I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see."

***That's why the Bible doesn't argue the existence of God. It just tells people about him.***

God's Holy spirit takes it from there.

Let's consider the Lego toys again. If that illustration makes sense to you; if it makes sense to you that the random Lego pieces become a house when an intelligent being puts them together, and that it's foolish to assume otherwise, it's because God has allowed you to see that.

If it makes sense to you that God is first, that he exists, that he is Creator, that he is glorious, and that we should live to glorify him, it's because God has allowed you to see that.

Friends, have you been born again? If you have heard the phrase before, but you don't know what it means, let us tell you. Please contact us at Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Teaneck, NJ. The contact information will appear at the end of this article.

There are many rewards to being born again. ***One is that you'll have answers to life's biggest questions.*** Let's take a look.

Where do we come from?

- God made us. Along with the chickens and the eggs.

That may sound simplistic, but then we get to the next question.

Do our lives have meaning and purpose?

- Yes, because God creates with meaning and purpose.
- If we put him first, he teaches us about that meaning and purpose.

Are we special in the universe?

- Yes, humans are cherished by God and are very special, being made in his image.

What does the future hold?

- History is "His Story", and God is in control!

Now, we have one more question of life. How should we run our world?

If you believe that God is First, that he exists, that he is creator, and that he is glorious, then you seek him in everything that you, whether personal or as a world. You live your life with confidence, meaning, and direction.

If you don't believe any of this, if you believe everything is the product of chance, then you're on your own. The world is on its own, too. We're all on our own. Our lives and the world are run with fear, confusion, and doubt. And all of this on a world-wide level! Sadly, this second option is pretty much what we see today in our world.

***For now, let's just say that it makes a big difference who runs the world.*** It makes a difference who runs our schools – who teaches our children. It makes a difference who runs our government. It makes a difference who holds power over our lives.

## Conclusion

So today, we've begun our series, "Life Answers in Genesis". We learned some important answers to life's questions by simply reading the first sentence of the bible. We learned that

- God is first.
- God is.
- God is Creator.
- God is Glorious.
- If God is first, then our main job is to glorify him.

Sadly, we learned that many disagree with this. The Atheists, the Materialists look at the universe as a product of chance. It's all just a gigantic roll of the dice.

We need to tell them about God. We need to proclaim the message of the bible, so that those people can be born again.

Of course, we need to be born again first. Have you been born again? If not, talk to us!

If you have been born again, then set in your heart to recognize the facts: God is first. If you haven't done so already, make a decision to put God first in your life.

If you're doing that, if you're putting God first, be encouraged.  
-Keep up the good work!

Because, when you put God first, you walk on the path of those find the answers to life's questions.

### Contact Information

Trinity Evangelical Free Church  
390 Teaneck Road, Teaneck, NJ 07666  
201-836-3393  
Email: [Info@TrinityTeaneck.org](mailto:Info@TrinityTeaneck.org)