

## **The Bible: Our True Story**

### Act One—The Goodness of Creation

**Passages:** Psalm 8  
Genesis 1:26– 2:3

**“Life is a story”**. But by saying that, I’m not only suggesting that your personal life is a story. I’m suggesting that the life of this universe is also a story! Indeed, I’m suggesting that every one of our individual stories takes place within the context of this universal story. And even though there are billions of individual stories in this world, **there is only one, comprehensive, overarching meta-narrative that explains them all and connects them all!** For this reason, no one of us can begin to make sense of their own story without making reference to this bigger story. A person’s identity (who you are and why you are here) cannot be explained except by reference to an over-arching story.

The ancient Greeks, for example, held to a universal story which included numerous gods and epic battles through which the earth, the seas, the mountains and lakes were created. Through this ancient story, they could make sense of how their land of Greece was formed and how their people came to exist. This story also gave them permission for certain behaviours; it gave them the justification to dominate and exterminate other ethnic groups. The ancient Greeks relied heavily on this ancient story to explain their existence and to justify the way they lived on this earth.

Of course, their ancient story has long been left behind. But, you can be sure that other stories have arisen to take its place. Indeed, one of the greatest story tellers of our day is Sir David Attenborough. The story he tells is called “The Theory of Evolution”. Now, before anyone tries to shoot me down and argue that “Evolution is not a story; it’s scientific fact”, listen to this reflection by a scientist.

“I am a scientist. Last week, a young boy asked me to define evolution. I didn't have a stock answer, but quickly came back with "it's a philosophy of life." It's a story that has implications; it's a worldview; a perspective.”

This scientist honestly recognises that **evolution is a story**... a story which seeks to explain how the world came into existence and how plant and animal life evolved over long periods of time. And this is what Sir David Attenborough is doing: He's telling a story! Indeed, he has given his life to promoting this story around the world. **(Let's watch him in action!)**

Of course, there is another story that also seeks to explain the origins of the universe and the purposes behind life-- **that's the story of the Bible**. As we have seen over the last 2 weeks, the Bible claims to be the one, true Universal story in which all other stories can be found. Indeed, as we saw last week, its narrative begins before the creation of the world, with a God who has eternally existed as Father, Son and Spirit, caught up in a circle of shared life, abundant and rich and beautiful. This story affirms that God is fundamentally a relational being, and that even before the earth was made, they (Father, Son and Spirit) were perfectly satisfied and content in their eternal Dance of life!

But, this idea leads us to ask a very important question: **If the Triune God was perfectly content in the fellowship of His eternal community, then why did 'they' create the universe?** The very first chapter of the Bible tells us-- The Trinity, it seems, wanted to open up the circle of their shared life and include us inside of it! Or, to put it in simpler terms, They desired to have a family!

This makes a lot of sense! After all, **love naturally breeds love!** If I think about all of the couples that I've married in this church, most of them have spoken openly to me about their desire to have children. It's a natural development in married life...to expand the circle of a couple's intimacy to include the product of that intimacy; children! In fact, the bond of love between a man and a woman naturally creates offspring who are a reflection of their own image. These offspring are, naturally, brought into (and nurtured inside) the dance of life of that couple! This is what happened within the Trinity! In the shared intimacy of their dance of life, they could not help but have a family... offspring created in their image!

But, of course, before a couple has children, they must prepare a home for them! That's why **Genesis 1:1- 25** tells the story of

creation; it's the story of how the Triune God prepared a home for their children. And so, the first thing they did was to create the larger environment...the context in which the home would be found. And so, from the first verse of Genesis 1 we read, **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** Here is the wider context— the Universe-- the neighbourhood in which the home would be found.

From verse 2, however, **God's focus is entirely concentrated on the earth!**

**<sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.<sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light."** (Genesis 1:1-3)

Then, as we move through the early verses of Genesis 1, the Triune God creates the sun, moon, and stars. Why? Because these planets will give light to the earth; they will mark off the earth's days, months, years; they will give the earth its seasons. The focus is entirely earth-centred! The universe exists for the well-being of the earth!

Indeed, as each step of the creation is completed, God pauses, looks over what He has made thus far, and (in the pride of a soon-to-be-father) declares, **"It is good"**. The Hebrew word for "good" (tov) refers to that which enhances, promotes, produces, or is conducive for life! What God has thus far created is deemed "good" because it will serve the greater purpose for which it is intended—To create the perfect home for His children!

As you can imagine, it is only when God finally finishes creating this home called earth that He is ready to bring forth the crown of His creation-- a man and a woman whom God will settle into their new home! But, instead of declaring this to be "good", God now looks over the whole creation and says **"It is very good!"** Clearly, all of God's creative energies which have been exerted on making this incredibly complex universe as a home for His children...children created **"in His image"**.... has finally been brought into existence!

Let me emphasize this again: Not only is this Biblical story earth-centred, but it is human-centred! Everything in God's plan has

(always and forever) been ultimately focused on His children! In other words, **the universe has no meaning without humankind!** We are the crown of God's creation!

But, what does the Bible mean when it says that human beings were created **"in God's image"**? Take a look at **Genesis 1:26–28**.

(I see 4 key points in this passage.)

**1. "In God's image" means that we were made to be co-rulers with God.**

In **verse 26**, God says, **"Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule..."** To rule with God, of course, implies that God holds us in high esteem. We carry His image; we are His children; and so, He trusts that we will rule the earth exactly as He rules the earth. Psalm 8 makes this clear:  
<sup>5</sup> **You have made (us) a little lower than the angels (or than God) and crowned (us) with glory and honour. <sup>6</sup> You made (us) rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under (our) feet"**

This also means that we must learn to see life in the same way that God sees it. As He declares what is "tov" ("good") for continued life on this planet, we (in turn) join Him in declaring this to be "good"! To be co-rulers with God also means that we are like Him in His compassion, love and care. Like Him, we are called to nurture the planet through personal engagement! To be made in God's image means that all human beings have been called to stand with God as vice-regents over the earth.

**2. "In God's image" means that we are all created as equals.**

In **verse 27**, we read the following:

**"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."**

Now, this verse principally indicates the equality between men and women. Because men and women bear God's image, both are equally honoured; both are equally esteemed. And because both have been given equal privilege and status as God's image-bearers, God will never elevate one gender as superior to another, or lower one as inferior to the other.

This is really important! For, you see, gender equality actually flows from the Trinity; from the fact that God is, essentially, both male and female! As we saw last week, the Spirit of God seems to carry more female characteristics, while the Word (or Son) of God (particularly in human form) bears more male characteristics. Yet neither the Spirit nor the Son can say the other is inferior to them. Neither is elevated over the other! That's because, in the end, all true masculinity and all true femininity flow equally from the Godhead!

Of course, this idea of equality must not stop with gender! Inherent in this verse is **racial** and **ethnic equality**. For the fact is that the Bible traces all human ancestry back to just one set of parents: Adam and Eve! Because Adam and Eve were made in God's image, all their offspring continue to bear that same image! This means that, despite your physical features, your skin colour, your culture, or your accent, your connection to Adam and Eve means that you are equal to everyone else! You are made in God's image! Moreover, no racial or ethnic group has the right to claim superiority over another. And, inversely, no racial or ethnic group needs to feel inferior to another.

Because all human beings are made in God's image, **all the diversity** we see in humankind (from skin colour, to culture, to language, to human skills and abilities) finds its origins within the Trinity! Because we've been made in God's image, the essential diversity of the Father, Son and Spirit has infiltrated and brought about the beautiful diversity of the human race! This is to be treasured and celebrated!

Of course, this idea of **equality** must also touch on the way God wants you to see yourself. Woody Allen once said, "My one regret in life is that I am not somebody else!" How sad! Because, flowing out of the diversity found in God, each of us has been given a unique character, a unique genetic makeup, a unique temperament; we all have unique skills and abilities; we have all been given unique opportunities and choices. Because God has made us in the beauty of His own diversity, He expects that we will appreciate this diversity and accept ourselves as unique! Regardless of how much fame you may or may not receive; how much or prestige you may or may not be offered; and regardless of how much money you may or may not earn; to be made in

God's image means that you are equal to every other human being on this planet!

**3. "In God's image" means that we were made for community.**

One of the most glorious aspects of the Trinity is the intense **community** in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwell. It's what the ancient theologians called 'perichoresis', or 'interpenetration'. Their community is open, honest, vulnerable and deep. And because **community** stands at the heart of the Trinity, it was also intended for all those who have been made in God's image. Adam and Eve were created by God to be communal beings.

This is also why God commands Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. In **verse 28**, God says: "**Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.**" Adam and Eve were called to expand this community by having children of their own!

What this means is that a life lived apart from community is a life that violates our nature! Without community, we shrivel and die. Of course, community necessitates that we be vulnerable with each other...and vulnerability can often lead to pain. But this is what we were created for; to open ourselves to one another in a level of honesty and trust that reflects the honesty and trust found inside the Trinity.

**4. "In God's image" means that we were created to rest in God's arms!**

**There is one final idea** that comes up in the opening verses of Genesis 2 which is integral to what it means to be made in God's image. In **verses 2 and 3**, the creation story is concluded with these words:

**"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."**

Some people think this means that God was tired--that's why He rested! But this cannot be the issue—God never tires; He never slumbers nor sleeps! So what does it mean for God to take a Sabbath rest? This rest was not taken for Himself! Rather, the Father, Son and Spirit took a Sabbath rest to enjoy each other's

company in the presence of their children, Adam and Eve. Throughout the Scriptures, this becomes the clear pattern-- once a week, God and those made in His image were meant to come together and rest together in each other's company, appreciating the fellowship of family!

I want to conclude today's message by reading a quote from Lesslie Newbigin.

"In our contemporary culture . . . two quite different stories are told. One is the story of evolution, of the development of species through the survival of the strong, and the story of the rise of civilization, our type of civilization, and its success in giving humankind mastery of nature. The other story is the one embodied in the Bible, the story of creation.... These are two different and incompatible stories." (Newbigin)

Why are these two stories incompatible? Let me say at the outset that the problems are not found on the micro-evolutionary level. Nor are the problems focused around whether the earth is 6000 years old or millions of years old. Nor are they concerned with whether or not dinosaurs roamed the earth at the same time as human beings. The real incompatibilities are found on the macro-level...what I would call the "philosophical level" of these two stories. We must compare the macro-stories and see where they will logically lead us:

### The Story of Evolution

### The Biblical Story of

### Creation

<p><b>A Universe-initiated story.</b> The random forces of the 'universe' have acted to cause evolution to occur. It started with the Big Bang and continues today. Who knows what the 'universe' will bring into existence next? Chance means nothing is intentional and no one is special.</p>	<p><b>A God-initiated story.</b> The Triune God has intentionally created the universe in order to have a home for their offspring. It all started in their eternal dance of life and expanded to include children who are relationally included in their love. Everyone is special! Everyone is loved!</p>
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<p><b>Earth has relative importance.</b> Although the earth is important to us, it is only one planet among many planets. Who knows if other planets/ other universes have life forms?</p>	<p><b>Earth has essential importance.</b> The heart of the story takes place here. The earth is the centre of the universe because it is the home which God has crafted for His offspring to dwell.</p>
<p><b>Humans are relatively important.</b> Because humans are evolved animals, we cannot be sure what might evolve in the future. Other life forms might evolve beyond us! Is anyone equal? What is work? What is rest?</p>	<p><b>Humans are made in God's image.</b> We are very important!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are co-rulers with God.</li> <li>• In our beautiful diversity, there is equality.</li> <li>• In our work with God, there is also rest with God.</li> </ul>

The popular media often portrays the creation vs. evolution debate as science vs. religion. The fact is neither of these stories has been established beyond a reasonable doubt (otherwise, the theory of evolution wouldn't be called the "theory" of evolution). The real issue is which of these two stories tells the truth about humanity! As this chart shows, all our views on human morality, justice, purpose, self-worth, obligation, fidelity and destination are all closely tied to which story we choose to believe.

The big question is: **Which story is yours?** Let's pray.