

SERMON NOTES
Genesis 1:1, 26-28
“Experiencing the Creator God Today”

Intro:

- Imagine what life would be like if human beings were machines rather than personalities – or imagine an existence without communication with other human beings – or without love
- John Lennon was able to imagine there’s no heaven or hell // no countries or religion // no possessions or greed or hunger
- *But even he could not imagine a human existence without love or communication or personality*
- These seem so intrinsic to human life that we don’t even stop to think: *Where do love and communication and personality come from?*
- *As most of you know, the most commonly accepted scientific theory for the origin of the universe is The Big Bang Theory – or newer variations called Inflationary Universe Theories*

Discoveries in astronomy and physics have shown beyond a reasonable doubt that our universe did in fact have a beginning. Prior to that moment there was nothing; during and after that moment there was something: our universe.

According to the standard theory, our universe sprang into existence around 13.7 billion years ago as an infinitesimally small, infinitely hot, infinitely dense, something called a singularity. Where did it come from? Scientists don't know. Why did it appear? Scientists don't know.

After its initial appearance, it apparently inflated (the "Big Bang"), expanded and cooled, going from very, very small and very, very hot, to the size and temperature of our current universe.

It continues to expand and cool to this day, and we are inside of it: incredible creatures living on a unique planet, circling a beautiful star clustered together with several hundred billion other stars in a galaxy soaring through the cosmos, all of which is inside of an expanding universe that began as an infinitesimal singularity which appeared out of nowhere for reasons unknown. This is the Big Bang theory.

In coming weeks we’ll look at questions such as: How does something come from nothing – and how does life come from non-life?

- But today think about this question: *How does personality come from an impersonal beginning and impersonal forces? How does love come from nothing – or even from impersonal matter and energy?*
- The dominant worldview of our day is that we are here as a result of the Big Bang and Random Chance and Darwinian Evolution and Natural Selection and Genetic Mutations and other impersonal forces – *apart from any divine activity or intelligent design or purpose*
- The universe just happened – life just happened – no reason or design or purpose – *it just happened*
- And of course, if that be true: *then human life has no meaning or purpose other than to pass on our genes to our offspring // there is no possibility of life after death // there is no heaven or hell or judgment or moral law or moral accountability // there is no such thing as angels or spiritual reality // worship and prayer are meaningless and futile activities // and what we call love is nothing more than the biological urge to propagate the species*
- Now you can believe that – or you can believe this:

Genesis 1:1 (NIV) ¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

- Everything did not come from Nothing – Everything came from Something – or rather from Someone to be more exact
- **Whatever begins to exist must have a cause**
- *Scientists have now proven that the universe began to exist – and their explanatory cause is the Big Bang – but what caused the Big Bang?*
- They have no answer – it just happened
- The universe – the heavens and the earth – matter and energy – did in fact have a beginning
- *Something existed before the beginning – before matter and energy and time and space – and that something was a Personal-Infinite Someone – the Creator God - - and that Infinite-Personal Creator God is the Source of all Life and all Personality and all Love*
- **An impersonal beginning can never adequately explain personal beings and the love in human relationships**
- *But the Bible reveals that the universe had a personal beginning – in fact, as Francis Schaeffer points out -- before “in the beginning” – before the heavens and the earth – the Personal was already there*
- **Love and thought and intelligence and Personality and communication and Relationship were already there – in the Triune God**
- **Before the beginning, there was God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – one God in Three Persons – loving one another // communicating with one another // enjoying fellowship with one another**

- *Where does personality come from? **From a Personal Creator God***
- *Where do love and communication come from? **From a Personal Creator God – existing in an eternal love relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit***
- *This is a Foundational Truth for a biblical Christian worldview: **God is an infinite-personal Creator who made us for a love relationship with Himself***
- *You cannot have a love relationship with a Singularity*
- *You cannot have a love relationship with hydrogen atoms and gases and rocks*
- ***But you can have a love relationship with an Infinite-Personal Creator God whose essential nature is Love***
- *Scientific evidence shows that the universe has form and structure and intelligent design intrinsic within it*
- ***But a biblical Christian worldview goes beyond belief in a divine Intelligent Designer***
- *The Creator God is much more than a brilliant Engineer*
- ***What gives us humans our glorious dignity is not just that we were well-designed by a Master Engineer***
- *What gives us humans our glorious dignity is that we were made in the image of a Personal Creator God who is Love in his essential Being and Nature – and who created us for a love relationship with Himself*
- ***We are not merely designed and engineered by our Creator – we are personally loved by our Creator, who by making us in his image has given us the capacity to love and be loved***
- *The Intelligent Designer behind the Design of the Universe is not merely a Master Engineer who finished His work on the 6th day of Creation -- He is a Personal Creator God to be experienced by us today in a personal love relationship*

The Seven Realities of Experiencing God: (Henry Blackaby)

(1) God is always at work around you.

John 5:17 ¹⁷Jesus said to them, **“My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”**

- *Sometimes we think that we need to prod God to get to work – that nothing much is going to happen in the church or in God’s kingdom until I take matters into my own hands and start making some things happen around here*
- *That wasn’t Jesus’ perspective on things*
- *Jesus’ perspective – as told in John 5:17-30 -- was this: *The Father has been working right up until now // Now God has me working with Him // I do nothing on my own initiative // I watch to see what the Father is doing // I know that the**

Father loves me and He shows me everything that He is doing so that I can join Him

- The problem today is not that God has stopped working in the church or in the world – *the problem is that sometimes we fail to recognize the activity of God in and around our lives and thus we fail to join Him in what He is doing*
- **The problem is that we are too busy implementing our own agendas and plans to notice what God is doing**
- *Or the problem is that God works in ways that don't fit neatly into our theological boxes or that stretch us too far beyond our comfort zones*
- **But the reality is: God is always at work around us**
- *God has been actively at work in the world throughout history – in fact, He is orchestrating history*
- Right now – all around us – God is at work in the world to bring about the salvation of those who are lost and dying in their sins apart from Christ
- *The Father is working through Christ to reconcile the world to Himself*

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 says: ¹⁸All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. ¹⁹For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. ²⁰We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!"

- **Reconciling the world to Himself through Christ is God's agenda – and God is seeking to move us on to His agenda – entering into the mainstream of His activity in the world – and as we do so – we come to know God by experience**
- It's not our place to come to God with our agenda that we want to accomplish for the church or for His kingdom – and then ask God to bless our agenda and make it successful
- *Rather God has His own agenda / His own purposes / His own ways of accomplishing His work and His own timetable – and He seeks to move us into the flow of His activity to accomplish His agenda*
- Before we ask God to show us His specific will for a decision we are making – we first need to align ourselves with the big picture of what God is doing in the world

Ephesians 1:9-10 God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure. ¹⁰And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.

- History is moving toward this conclusion:

Matthew 24:14 (NIV) ¹⁴ **And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.**

- *God is at work in the world right now bringing to fulfillment that ultimate purpose*
- **God is moving people around the globe to bring people within hearing of the Gospel**
- *He is sending missionaries – not just from the USA – but from many other nations to bring the Gospel to unreached peoples*
- *And He is moving millions of immigrants from nations with restricted access to the Gospel into countries with greater exposure to the Gospel so that they will have opportunities to hear the Gospel and be saved*
- *God is at work in the world today to bring about the fulfillment of the Great Commission in preparation for the return of Christ*
- *God is also at work in our families and workplaces and communities to draw people to Himself and to transform believers into the likeness of Christ and to manifest and express the heart and character of Jesus through the words and deeds of his body, the church*
- **God is the one who takes the initiative to accomplish His work in accordance with His ways and His purposes**
- *Our job is to recognize His activity and then join Him in His work*

(2) God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.

- *God is not just looking for servants through whom He can accomplish His work – God is looking for sons and daughters who will love Him and let Him love them*
- *God created you and me for the purpose of experiencing a love relationship with Himself*
- *The quality of that love relationship is the key to knowing and doing the will of God*
- *Though we sometimes have the perception that we are seeking God and sometimes having a hard time finding Him – the reality is that God is the one who initiates and pursues a love relationship with us*

1 John 4:9-10 says: ⁹God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

- **God created you for a love relationship with Himself – and God is always at work drawing you to Himself – calling to you – revealing Himself to you – pursuing you and seeking to draw you into a love relationship with Himself**
- I heard a song on the radio the other day with a line something like this: *Draw me to Yourself so that I will run after You*
- That is the biblical perspective
- *That is the kind of Creator God we worship – not a distant, remote, detached Deity who designed and engineered and wound up the watch of the universe and then watches it run by natural law – but rather a Personal God who is Love and is actively pursuing us and seeking to draw us into a love relationship with Himself*
- *Sometimes God uses other Christians as His voice to call out to you to return to Him*
- Are you listening? Do you recognize the voice of God in the pleas of other Christians to return to Him and let Him love you?
- **The first step in experiencing God today is to let God love you**

(3) God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.

- Sometimes we mistakenly think that it is our job to dream big dreams for God and then ask God to bless our plans and our efforts
- *But God is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe – and He is already at work around us – and He is the One who initiates a love relationship with us and invites us to become involved with Him in His work*
- **Our job is to recognize His activity and to respond in faith and obedience to His invitation to join Him in His work**
- God invites us to become involved with Him in His work for our benefit – *so that we can come to know Him better // so that we can live a life of significance // so that we can experience the fulfillment and adventure of partnering with the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth in accomplishing His purposes in the world*
- *Where is God at work around you? Where does God want you to get involved in His activity? Where is God working in your life // in your family // in our church // in our community // in your school or workplace // in the Quad Cities / in Mt. Joy? In Reynosa? In Moldova? In the world around you?*
- **When God shows you where He is at work – that is His invitation for you to join Him there**

(4) God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.

- Communication is at the heart of a love relationship

- *Not only do we worship and serve a God who creates and acts and saves // but we also worship a God who speaks – not just in the past – not just in Bible times – but a God who is still speaking today*
- Henry Blackaby: *“The testimony of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is that God speaks to His people. In our day, God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. He uses the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church (other believers). No one of these methods of God’s speaking is, by itself, a clear indicator of God’s directions. But when God says the same thing through each of these ways, you can have confidence to proceed.*
- *“God is going to be revealing Himself so that you can trust Him. He is going to reveal His purposes so you will be involved in His work rather than some other work.*
- *“He reveals His ways so you can accomplish His purposes in a way that will glorify Him. You cannot discover these truths about God on your own. Truth is revealed.”*
- Now God is not revealing new doctrinal truths about Christ or salvation today
- *God has already revealed everything we need for salvation in the NT Scriptures*
- **But God did not cease speaking to His people to give direction as to His will when the NT was completed**
- *Just as God is still active doing what only God can do today – so also God is still speaking to His people today to disclose His will to us*

John 10:3-4 Jesus says: **The sheep hear his (the shepherd’s) voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognize his voice.**

John 10:27 ²⁷**My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me.**

- Henry Blackaby: *If the Christian does not know when God is speaking, he is in trouble at the heart of his Christian life!”*
- *Do you recognize the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd speaking to you?*
- Of course, the first place to turn to hear the Shepherd’s voice is the Bible – anything else the Shepherd speaks to you by any other means will be consistent with the Bible if indeed it is the Shepherd’s voice
- As you grow strong and knowledgeable in the Word of God – and as you continue to grow in your love relationship with Jesus – you will hear the voice of Christ speaking by His Spirit through other means as well
- **Though the Bible is the primary way that God speaks to us today – it is not the only way**

- *The Bible itself gives many examples of many other forms of communication between God and His people*
- Even after the OT Scriptures were written, God continued to speak to His people by various other means – *The Christmas story gives several examples of these forms of communication*
- ***We need to be careful that we don't treat the Bible as a book of exceptions rather than as a book of examples when it comes to God speaking to us***
- *Sometimes we need specific guidance that goes beyond the teachings of the Bible*
- Specific guidance about job decisions or ministry involvement or mission trips or housing decisions or marriage and family decisions – *and though we always look first to biblical principles – we often need to hear the Shepherd's voice telling us more specifically which way to go*
- *That is a vital part of developing a love relationship with Jesus Christ*
- *Today God speaks to us by the Holy Spirit in order to give us clear directives as to His will for our lives in accordance with His purposes*
- ***The key to knowing God's voice is to develop your love relationship with God***
- *Knowing the will of God is not so much a formula or set of rules to follow as it is a matter of knowing God by abiding in a close love relationship day by day with our Lord Jesus*

(5) *God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.*

- God doesn't call us to get involved in His work so that people around us can see what WE can do – **God calls us to get involved in His work so that a watching world can see what GOD can do**
- *In order to reveal Himself to a watching world – God will often ask you to do something that you cannot do – He will ask you to do something that He must accomplish through you*
- When God asks you to do something that you cannot do – you will face a crisis of belief
- For example, God's invitation to Moses to work with God in delivering the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt led Moses to a crisis of belief
- *Moses doubted his ability to do this assignment // he doubted his speaking ability // he doubted his credibility // he doubted whether the people would believe him and follow him as their spiritual leader*
- And how did God answer Moses' objections?
- *By telling Moses that Moses was being too modest and actually had much more ability to do the job than he realized?*

- **NO – God responded by reminding Moses of who God is – because deliverance wasn't about who Moses was – it was all about who God was**
- When Moses asked “*Who am I?*” – God replied: *I will be with you*
- When Moses protested: *I'm clumsy with words* – God replied:

Exodus 4:11-12 : ¹¹“*Who makes mouths?*” the LORD asked him. “*Who makes people so they can speak or not speak, hear or not hear, see or not see? Is it not I, the LORD?*”
¹²*Now go, and do as I have told you. I will help you speak well, and I will tell you what to say.*”

- God wasn't asking Moses to do this job by his own ability or strength or wisdom – *God was asking Moses to do this job by faith – by trusting God to do what God said He would do – trusting God to do what only God could do*
- *We don't experience God most powerfully by limiting ourselves to doing what we're confident we can accomplish on our own*
- We experience God by saying YES to His assignments of asking us to do what we know we cannot do
- At some point God is going to come to you as an individual or to us as a church with a God-sized assignment requiring God to show up to make it happen
- *Your instinctive reaction will be to take personal inventory of your abilities or your financial resources – or of our church's financial resources – and then to think: **I don't have the right abilities or experience – or – where are we going to get the money for that?***
- That is a crisis of belief
- *Do we look at our own abilities and resources and say: **NO, I can't** – or do we look at the Infinite-Personal Creator God who made the heavens and the earth and say: **I will depend on You to accomplish through me what I could not do by myself?***

(6) You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.

- Henry Blackaby: *You cannot stay where you are and go with God at the same time*
- Though many of us try, don't we?
- *We want to know God by experience as we stay safe and secure in our comfort zones – same ways of thinking // same circumstances // same relationships // same commitments // same behaviors // same beliefs // same activities // same kind of assignments as we have been doing for years and years*
- **Do you want to grow or do you want to stay the same? You can't do both at the same time – individuals can't – and churches can't**

- Often the major adjustments take the form of changes in our thinking and attitudes / changes in our character / changes in our values and priorities and commitments / changes in our relationships / changes in our plans / changes in our ministries / changes in our understanding of God's ways
- *The adjustments have to do with becoming a moldable servant who is at God's disposal to be used as God sees fit*
- The process of developing a servant attitude will call for major adjustments for all of us
- *To teach us servanthood – God must teach us humility and obedience*
- How does God teach humility and obedience?
- *Certainly not by making life comfortable and easy and giving us our own way in everything*
- Often God teaches us humility and obedience by placing us under authority and then testing our submissiveness by giving us directions through human authorities that we disagree with
- We often miss the point entirely when we are engaged in conflicts – we tend to think it's all about proving we're right and doing what's best in our own eyes – *when actually God wants to use the conflict as an opportunity to mold us and shape us into the instrument of His choosing by teaching us humility and submissiveness*
- **To teach us servanthood – God must teach us humility and obedience**
- *That requires major adjustments in our thinking and attitudes*
- During the course of this sermon series, all of us will be challenged to adjust our current worldview in some spots to make our worldview more biblical
- *None of us has a fully formed worldview that is perfectly aligned with the Bible at all points*
- ***You cannot stay where you are and go with God at the same time***

(7) *You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work through you.*

- Once you have determined to follow God by faith, and you have made the required adjustments to God and His ways – then you must obey Him
- *It is not merely by reading the Bible // it is not merely by believing what you read in the Bible – that you come to know God by personal experience – **rather it is only as you obey God that you will come to know God by experience – God becomes real in your life as you obey Him and join Him in His work***
- There are some Christians who believe every word in the Bible about all of God's past activity on behalf of His people – providing for them / protecting them / rescuing them / accomplishing His work through them

- *They believe God was a Provider and Protector in Bible times – but they are not experiencing God as Provider and Protector in their own life today*
- *They believe God spoke to His people and was powerfully active among them in Bible times – but they are not hearing His voice or seeing His activity today*
- *It is not enough simply to believe that the Bible is true – in the sense of a history book that accurately records God’s past activity in ancient history*
- **The Bible teaches that the Infinite-Personal Creator God is a living God – and He has never stopped speaking and acting and working and accomplishing His purposes – and He is alive to be encountered by us today**
- *And it is as we obey God and join God in what He is doing today – and it is as God accomplishes His work through us – that we come to know the God of the Bible by personal experience in our lives today*
- *Those of you who have gone on mission trips know this to be true*
- ***It is as you experience God working in and through you – loving you and loving others through you // speaking to you and speaking to others through you // meeting your needs and meeting the needs of others through you // healing you and bringing healing to others through you // showing mercy to you and showing mercy to others through you // encouraging you and encouraging others through you // teaching you and teaching others through you // winning spiritual victories for you and winning spiritual victories for others through you // stretching your faith and stretching the faith of others through you --it is as you obey God and experience God working in and through you – that the Maker of heaven and earth // the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob // the God of Moses // the God of the Bible -- becomes real in your personal experience***

Prayer

Hymn # 382 “Be Thou My Vision”