

INTRODUCTION

Today we start a new series in the opening chapters of Genesis. Henry Ford may have said, "*History is bunk*", but the truth is we cannot understand where we are today unless we understand where we have come from.

Imagine an American citizen who has been held by a remote South American tribe in the depth of the forest for 5 years. He is released and returns home. He opens his newspaper and watches his T.V. He is astonished to find U.S. troops in Afghanistan and in Iraq. He hears about Guantanamo Bay and the worldwide war against terrorism. Why has all this happened? I suspect he will only start to make sense of it all, after someone explains to him the events of 9.11.

It is the same with all of us. We cannot fully understand why we are here? What is our purpose on earth? Where we have come from? Who indeed we are? Unless we come back to these opening chapters of **Genesis** and read God's explanation of how it all started.

Now there is a lot of controversy about these opening chapters. However this mostly relates to the account of creation. We will be coming back to this later in the series. However how our World was formed is really only a secondary theme of our reading. This chapter is primarily all about God. As the opening stanza of his revelation to mankind, this is one of the most important chapters in the whole Bible in explaining what God's character is like. And remember God is unchanging. He is the same yesterday, and today and forever. So what we learn of God in Genesis I is equally true now and will remain true beyond the end of time.

So how do you discover what someone is like? One way is to observe what they do. So let us look through the action verbs in the chapter, which have God as their subject. Notice that many of them recur again and again and again. My old Sunday School teacher used to say that if the Bible said something once it was important; if it repeated itself it was incredibly important. So imagine how vital these truths must be if they come again and again and again throughout this chapter.

1. God Creates v1, v21, v27

We have a God who creates things. Indeed if you also include the references to "made" we are reminded of this fact ten times in this chapter including three times in one verse (v27). He is truly a creator God.

So we should not be surprised that Jesus, the Son of God could bring dead people like Lazarus (John 11) back to life. He created life in the first place. Or make fish and bread to feed 5000 people. He made matter in the first place. Nor should we be surprised that God plans to create a New Heaven and a New Earth in due course. It is in His nature. He will truly make all things new.

This verb in Genesis 1 v1 is only used with God as its subject in the Old Testament. It defines the start of our relationship with Him. You often hear people say "*What right has God to interfere in my life, or tell me what to do?*" Of course He has every right as He made you. Indeed it is folly to ignore a person who brought you into existence and indeed you are totally dependent on as even your next breath is subject to Him continuing to sustain the Universe.

So when you think of God, or "worship" Him, are you conscious that you are His creation and that without Him, you would have no existence. No wonders the Church loses something of the awe and wonders and fear it ought to feel towards God, when it pushes God the creator onto the back burner.

2. God Hovers v2

What a strange verb to describe God. Yet it is vital to help us understand what sort of creator God is. The verb in Hebrew has two main meanings. The first, which you will find in verses like Deut 32 v11 or Isaiah 31 v5, describes a bird of prey hovering in the air, waiting to dive on its victim. Clearly in the context of Genesis 1 v2 that isn't the meaning of the verb here. The other use of this verb is to describe an artist or sculpturer poised over their work considering where precisely to put the next brush stroke or chip the next sliver of stone away. That is the picture of God this verse wants to convey.

About 10 days ago I hear a lecture about Michelangelo and how many of his works took years of painstaking love and creative thought to bring to fruition. So this verb tells us that God put care and thought into his creation. He is not a God who just thoughtlessly mass-produces things. Isn't it amazing that the God, who "*made the stars*" v16 stopped and considered before making you. Out of all the billions of human being there have or will ever be you are absolutely unique. There is no one else like you. Even my mother, who is an identical twin, is different in so many ways from her sister.

In a culture that has turned away from God and increasingly struggles with relationships, we find so many have low self worth. It is not just the high levels of anything from anorexia to self-harming. So many normal people do not feel they have any value in our society.

Worldly wisdom calls on us to learn to love ourselves. “*Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all*” are the words of the hit song. The problem is that if we ourselves seek to love ourselves more, it merely seems to increase the levels of selfishness, narcissistic tendencies and distance in relationship in our world.

If we truly want to know self worth in a health way, we need not to look inward, but to God, to be secure in the fact that he made us in his image, special and unique. And furthermore he loved us so much he died on the cross to rescue us.

3. God said v3, v6, v9, v11, v14 etc

This is the most frequent verb in the chapter coming eleven times. Our God is one who speaks. He speaks through creation so **Psalm 19** tells us “*The heavens declare the glory of God*”. Jogging early in the morning this week with the sun coming up over the horizon and the woods a carpet of bluebells, it was almost impossible not to marvel at the wonder of our creator.

Yet God also speaks specifically through his words. In the Bible He tells what He is thinking, what He is planning, what are His purposes. He reveals Himself to us. So we should not be surprised that when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, Jesus spent so much of his time teaching, teaching his disciples, teaching the crowds, even taking time to speak to His enemies.

And notice in this chapter, what God says happens. We say, “*Talk is cheap*” because it is easy for us to say something which we cannot do, or which we have no intention of carrying out. God’s Words have real power. He always means what He says and what He promises will always without fail come to pass.

You can tell which of their teachers my children respect and admire. They are the ones they listen to, heed and obey. Do you believe in a God who speaks? If that is true do you listen to His Word? Do you believe His Words? Do you heed and obey them with God’s help?

4. God Sees v4, v10, v12b, v18b etc

Seven times in this chapter we are reminded that God sees. Nothing is hidden from his gaze. And He doesn’t just see the surface appearance. He sees that what He has made is good. He is able to judge the value and the reality that lies behind the exterior.

So Israel later on could say – look at our sacrifices, look at our Temple attendance etc. Yet God sees their souls and can expose the hidden truth – their hearts were far from Him.

Jesus also saw through the front people put up. Most people of His day thought what religious people the Pharisees were. Jesus saw through their façade and exposed their hypocrisy.

So God sees everything about us. Nothing about us is hidden from Him. Do you truly believe this as you come into his presence this afternoon? Or do you think you can bluff your way through without Him knowing how you really are.

It is a truly scary thing to know that the very depth of our being is clear to God. We may delude ourselves, but not the lord of all creation. It is also a truly wonderful thing that He sees everything about us. He knows the worst about us and still has come here today seeking us. No need to pretend, no point in trying to hide, no need to try and explain, you can just come knowing He already knows and understands. This is the reality of the God who sees

5. God Separates v3, v6, v14, v17

God is one who sets apart for his purposes. Some people find this hard to accept, but it is his nature. It is so often necessary in our society. Imagine a group turn up to play netball. No one knows their role and team cannot play as a unit until it is decided who will be “Goal Attack”, and who will be “Goal Defence” and who will play each of the other roles in the team. They then put on their bibs identifying them for that position and setting them apart to play for the team in a particular way.

God too sets apart people for His purposes. So Abram is called out of Ur. Moses later is chosen to lead out his people. God too called the Prophets for a particular role. And so God calls His people to be separate today; to be holy just as He is holy; set apart to be distinctive and to fulfil His role for us. And on that final day there will be another great separation as God divides the sheep from the goats (*Matthew 25*).

Are we willing to submit and rejoice that we have a God who calls us to be set apart for His will?

6. God Calls or Names v5, v8, v10

We have a God who gives names to things and people. He is a God who calls his creation by name. Giving something a name is a sign that it belongs to you. Also that there is a relationship between the namer and the named. The plants in our garden don't have personal names, but the dogs do.

So God changed Abram's name to Abraham. So Jesus called Simon, Peter. And He calls us by name, whether it is Moses from the burning bush, Samuel in the dead of night or Mary in the garden (John 20 v16).

The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and calls us by name and He knows us by name, personally and particularly.

So how do you sum up the nature of God from these first six verbs? A couple have their longed for first child. They give him or her a name. They take the child home from hospital, away from all the other babies born there. They never tire of just looking down at their small bundle of joy. They talk to their infant, even when he or she cannot understand. How would you sum up these parents? You can do so with one word: love. And the same is true of our creating, seeing, speaking, separating, naming Father. He is love. And each of these aspects of His character bears witness to this fact.

Three more action verbs as we are running out of time:

7. God Blesses v22, v28

We have a God who longs to bless. We will see later in the series that one of the greatest lies of the devil is that God is mean and doesn't want what is best for us (Genesis 3 v1-4) and it is still the lie that he peddles today. People don't want God anywhere them as they fear he will ruin and spoil their lives. No, no, no. We must declare; we must live; we must believe that we serve a God who longs to bless. He is a God who gives bountifully and with overflowing generosity. More than we can ask or imagine. Let us always count our blessings.

8. God Finishes 2 v2

Our God finishes what He starts. He fulfils all His promises. He will see it all through to the end. You can count on it. So though we struggle against sin, our salvation was complete from the moment Jesus cried, "*it is finished*" on the cross. And He will judge the living and dead. Here we are at the beginning of time, but when we arrive at the end of time we will see the same God tying up every loose end. All will be brought to completeness

9. God Rests 2 v2, v3

Now Joe Dent will be preaching a whole sermon on this theme later in this series, so I don't want to steal his thunder. However again this is a key characteristic of our Lord, we are apt to overlook.

Note that God is not a slave to work or activity. He is not a workaholic. He can stop and appreciate what He is made. He is not driven.

This is not a rest of complete inactivity, for God continues to sustain His creation. However He has time to sit back and enjoy it. Can we say the same about our service for Him, or for our families?

God has made us in His image, so we are made to have and enjoy rest. Even more importantly one of the great things we have to look forward to is fully entering His rest when we get to glory and to know a wonderful taste of it now in a culture whose restlessness is a sure sign of their rejection of God.

Conclusion

If I asked you at the beginning to write down a few words that describe God, how many of the nine we have looked at this afternoon would have been on the list. This is far from an exhaustive list as there are so many more words describing our Lord in the Bible. However these are crucial truths about Him. If we trust Him, then we must trust in these aspects of His very nature, for it is whom we have faith in that matters. If some of these facets of His nature are missing from the god we believe in, then we are so much the poorer. So do meditate on these verbs in the week ahead and trace their recurrence through out the revelation of God in our hands. Amen