

The Light From Above  
Genesis 1:1-5, John 1:1-5  
Pastor Dave Carver  
The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights  
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It doesn't take a rocket scientist, a brain surgeon, or even a preacher to notice the similarities between the beginning of John's gospel and the beginning of Genesis, does it? Did you hear an echo there? A repeating refrain?

Author Eugene Peterson puts it simply, if a little boldly. He says that the entire Gospel of John is essentially a rewriting of Genesis 1 and 2<sup>1</sup>. That sounds a little odd at first, but I think he's right on the money. Not only does the beginning of John's Gospel sound a lot like the beginning of Genesis, but John, in his writing, tells the Jesus story through Genesis eyes.

Now why would John, writing thousands of years after Genesis was written, feel the need to frame the Jesus story in this way? Were they starting to teach evolution at Samaria Public School? Were people forgetting their history?

No, it was worse than that. People were forgetting who they were. People were forgetting *whose* they were. Let's take a look at the text.

To start with, let's affirm the fact that while we did not read the entire first chapter of Genesis, you will probably remember that it tells the story of creation. Not just the story of a creation, but the story of a creation that is rooted and anchored in TIME. The creation as described in Genesis is one that has rhythm and structure, direction and purpose. Listen:

In the beginning, what was the earth? Without form. Void. Whatever was, was meaningless. There was chaos. There was no structure or boundaries.

And God said. God *said*. That is, creation is begun and purposed through the speech of God, or, if you like, through the story of God. That's important to note – that Creation is effected through the Word of God.

And God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. And what did the light do? It divided the Creation into day and night. Evening and morning. The first day. And if you ever went to Bible School as a kid, you know the rest of Genesis 1, don't you? Seven days of creation. All that is is brought forth in a steady rhythm and in a meaningful time. Each episode of creation ends with the phrase, "there was evening, and there was morning, a second/third/fourth/etc. day." Do you see? Creation – the physicality of all that is, everything that we can see and apprehend and appreciate – is anchored in and rooted in time. And time is what helps mark it as meaningful. We would not know – there would not be – creation without time.

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<sup>1</sup> *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) p. 85.

And then we get to Genesis two, and we hear the story of creation all over again. Only in Genesis two, it's not a story about time. It's a story about a place, isn't it? What is the place that we associate with Creation in Genesis two? The Garden of Eden. Humanity, rooted and anchored in meaningful time, is gifted with sacred space in which to accomplish the will of the Creator.

The creation story is rooted in God-ordered time and seated in God-blessed space. Creation is thus rooted and seated in the opposite of chaos and disorder. That means that everything that is – after all, have you ever seen an uncreated object? – is so rooted and seated. You and I are anchored in this God-ordered time and God-blessed space. We know something of chaos and we know something of darkness, but we do not have to fear it and we do not need to allow it to rule in our lives.

Ah, but beloved, we forget. And we did. We forgot that we were thus blessed and rooted. And so John, the beloved Apostle, tells us that after an uncountable number of years of caring for the creation and tending to the creatures, God spoke again.

But when God spoke, said John, it was not a new Word. It was the same Word. When God sent Light, it was not new Light, but the same Light. And the Word that God spoke and the Light that God sent was Jesus.

Now when Matthew and Luke wanted to tell us about the beginnings of Jesus' ministry, they started with the baby who was born in a manger and visited by shepherds and wise men. That's not a bad place to start, because we need to know that the Savior is one of us. Is human. Knows us. But when John wants to describe the ministry of the Savior, he starts in the beginning, making sure that we know that Jesus was there, in the beginning, bringing order to chaos. Jesus is the one who brings light to the darkness. And in his Gospel, John proclaims that Jesus, the light of the world, has come to us, now, in this place.

Now why has Jesus come to this time and this place? Well, for 21 chapters, John goes on to talk about how in word and in deed, Jesus demonstrates that we are living in a time that is filled with meaning and purpose. Jesus, in his conversations and healings, reminds people that their lives – and mine, and yours – are a part of God's creational intent to stand against chaos and darkness and to bear witness to God's creative purposes.

More than that, John spends a lot of his 21 chapters emphasizing the importance of place. He tells us where specific conversations occurred and the hometowns of specific people. He tells us of a savior who walked the same roads that we do so that we, too, can hold fast to the truth that this place, like every place, is God's blessed place. A careful reading of the fourth Gospel will lead you to conclude that there is no place that you can be – at school, or at the grocery store, or at the bedside of a sick friend, or at your own dinner table – there is no place that is not somehow touched and blessed by God's presence there.

Now I say that, but I know, and you know, that there is a darkness in the world. There is a blight that tempts you and me to believe that there is no order to life and no meaning to place, and we live among those who believe that there is nothing but chaos. We are tempted to believe that this is not the right time to live as God's own, or that the place where we are is just not right. Our current houses, or jobs, or skills, are somehow beyond God's reach. If somehow we could only get to the point where we were making this much money or if we had this much more free time *then* we could make a difference in the world. Once I get the degree, or the new job, or when I finally get away from this house and away from that person, *then* I'll be free to follow Jesus.

Oh, nobody is denying Jesus. No, not at all. It's just that, well, it's not our time yet. We're not in the right place to really follow him, that's all. We are tempted to believe that we need to wait or to move *before* we can live faithfully. We want to live right, but, well, we just can't. Not yet. Not here.

But John, and Genesis, say, uh, well, "shut up." That's not going to fly. Because God has given a Word. And God has given Light – to this time, and to this place. To put it slightly differently, you can see the Light of God from where you are sitting. You do not have to wait for it or look for it.

Now that, my friends, is incredible. And that has some amazing implications for our lives. The Light of God, here? The Word of God, in your life? What are we doing about that?

That's a great question. Come back next week, and we'll talk some more. Amen.