



Sermon Growth Guide

August 16, 2020

The Beautiful Story – Beautiful God

Genesis 1:1-13

Key Verse: Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Big Idea: The beauty of God and His creation causes our hearts to sing.

Foundations

This week we start our fall series together, ***The Beautiful Story***. Fyodor Dostoevsky said, “Beauty will save the world.” What he meant was that beauty has a power other forces don’t have. Beauty has the ability to stop us in our tracks, catch us up in wonder and awe and penetrate the heart before we know what has happened. Beauty can break down barriers between people, create common ground for common grace and even unite opponents. God made the world with beauty for a reason.

Are you captured by the beauty of God? What captivates your heart? Why does God create beautiful things?

Open and close your time of further study in prayer. Ask the Spirit of God to guide and guard your study of His Word.

Understanding God’s Word

Spend time studying Genesis 1:1, the opening words to Scripture. What most stands out to you? What questions are raised in your mind?

What’s your favorite act of creation in Genesis 1:1-13? Why?

In verse 10 of our passage we find this remark, “God saw that it was good.” What did God see? If God declares something to be good, is it objectively good?

Applying God’s Word

This week we learn that the beauty of God and His creation causes our hearts to sing. What action step can you take to apply this Kingdom Truth to your week?

Witnessing God’s Word

The people of God are compelled to share God’s love and salvation. Think of one person who does not yet walk closely with the Lord and who would be blessed to hear of the beauty of God. Take a moment to close your time by praying for that person. Discern an action step you can take in moving toward this person with the love of Christ.

What is the last time you were captured by beauty? Truth makes you say, "Huh." Goodness makes you say, "Yes." Beauty stops you in your tracks, arrests the soul, and makes you say, "Wow." Beauty. When my kids were little, beginning with our first, I had a little thing I would make them say. This was in the car seat stage, you know, when kids are always looking out the window, eyes wide open, soaking in all they see out there. We would see a sunset with the sky all red and orange and yellow, and I would say, "Who made that sunset?" "God." "Who did God make it for?" "For me," my kids would say. "Why did God make it so beautiful?" "Why?" "Because God loves you." Really, that is the only answer for the question of beauty. Because God loves you. That's why God made it beautiful.

Welcome to ***The Beautiful Story.***

The story of everything. The story of God and the world he made, and the people on it, and the way it went wrong and broken, and the plan God has to bring it all back to right again in the end. It's a beautiful story. We Christians who know the story, we have gotten used to defending the story as true. We work to prove the story is good. But from time to time, we forget that this story is beautiful. And the world needs the beauty of it. Let's learn to tell it again, the great story, the wonderful story, and tell it with all the beauty God puts into it. Beauty breaks down barriers an argument cannot. Beauty penetrates the heart in ways that reasoned discourse and apologetic argument just can't do. God made us to love beauty. Beauty has direct access to our souls.

Now, I'm not talking about Barbie doll beauty; Barbie and Ken, makeup magazine, fashion blog beauty. No. That's far too small. Far too narrow. We need broader minds than that. Forget that. I'm talking about staring over the waves of the sea, the light on the mountains, the dew on the

grass, the delicate power of the hummingbird at its feeder. Human things too. Sure. A song sung by a child, a 50-years faithful marriage, a hardened cynic who finds a charitable moment and lends a hand to the helpless. Beauty. It's big. It stops you in your tracks. Church, I want us to have a category in our minds for beauty. God's beauty. So we can look for it, track it, keep it and let it convince us of a few things. It may change the way we tell the great and beautiful story.



The beautiful story. It all starts with God, with a beautiful God. Thomas Aquinas said, "Beauty is that which, when seen, pleases." Sometimes we tell stories of God that are not beautiful; that is, we tell the story in a way that hides the beauty. We tell shrunken stories of God. That's what James Bryan Smith calls them. In fact, if you want to read a book along with this series, let me recommend James Bryan Smith, *The Magnificent Story*. We tell shrunken stories of God. God as an angry judge waiting for you to find a way to appease his wrath and make up for all the mistakes you've made. God as a disappointed father, who told you what to do and can't believe you made such a mess of it. God who waits in heaven, arms crossed, frowning in disgust at how you can't figure out how to make this world right. Shrunken stories of God. Do those pictures of God make you stop in your tracks? Do those "gods" arrest your soul and make you say, "Wow"? No. Apply the beauty test. Beauty is that which, when seen, pleases. The world is tired of our shrunken stories of God. The world is thirsty for beauty. Good news! God is beautiful! Now, let's be careful along the way that we are not simply testing the story for what pleases us. "Beauty is that which, when seen, pleases." Aquinas didn't mean we test the story

for what pleases us. But the other way around. If we haven't dug down to the awe, the splendor, the glory, the beauty of it, we still have some digging to do. If people are disgusted by our story of a shrunken, ugly God, we're telling it wrong. God is beautiful and the author of beauty.

The Beautiful Story starts with a beautiful God making a beautiful creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Who made this? God did. God made it. It is the foolishness of the heart, not academic rigor, that accepts an origination story without a Creator. Creation declares the glory of its Creator. Just ask Francis Collins, the Director of the National Institute on Health, the Human Genome Project, and this year's winner of the Templeton Prize in science and theology. He wrote a book called *The Language of God* about his work on DNA and the design intelligence so apparent. Creation is full of fingerprints of its Creator. Who made it? God did.

This God, when Genesis was written, was not some stranger or unknown god. This God was and is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God who made covenants with the people of Israel and kept His word. The God who intervened in their slavery in Egypt and appointed Moses to come and set them free. That's the "God" we are talking about here as we peer into the very beginnings of history by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Moses knew the God of which he spoke. "In the beginning." The story has a beginning. This God who intervened in history does not belong to history but created history, created time itself. God was there before the beginning and created the beginning. "In the beginning God created the

heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). That means all of it. Who made it? God did. Why did He make it beautiful?

Is this God alone? "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" (Genesis 1:2). The Spirit of God is there. God and the Spirit of God. "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). God spoke. The voice of God was there. The Word of God was there. We learn more about this when we read John 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:1-5). The Word was God. You don't get to be part of creation if you're not God. This Word became flesh. Jesus was there. This is the Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And we know it's a community, even right there in Genesis 1, because God speaks in plural. "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground'" (Genesis 1:26). God is not alone. We know this God. This is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ together with the Holy Spirit. Trinity.

Every other story, including the atheistic supposedly scientific story, casts creation as an accident or a tragedy. What we have here, in this beautiful story, is a God fully at peace. No conflict. Not aching alone or in need or



frustrated. God is in joyful community with Himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This God does not create out of lack, or need, or dissatisfaction. This God doesn't create out of necessity. God creates out of a fullness, an overflow, a desire to express and share His glory, His joy, His completeness of eternal life, the satisfying celebratory love of Father, Son, Holy Spirit—this is the motivation to bring the universe into being! To radiate glory! To share the fulfilling joyful community of the Trinity. Love. Peace. Joy. God moves on these, acts on these, and makes the world. A beautiful God.

A beautiful God makes a beautiful world. Light and dark playing in contrast. Day and night. Warmth and life and energy matched and balanced with coolness and rest and return. Waters and seas. A vault—we would say atmosphere. A place to live. Waters below, waters above the sky—clouds. Mountain ranges and castles of clouds full of water up in the sky. Did you know the average cumulus cloud is 1.1 million pounds of water? There's a lot of water up there. But we have a place to live. So beautiful. Who made this? Why did He make it beautiful? Then God made us and put us in it. A beautiful God, supremely satisfied, happy, at peace and full of love in community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; a God who needs nothing from you or anyone else, needs nothing at all, creates the cosmos out of an overflow of celebration—and smiles broadly, even laughs with joy, to see you join in it and bask in it and celebrate it with Him. That's God. God is wowed by His creation. What's the refrain? "And God saw that it was good." And God saw that it was good. And God saw that it was very good! Wow!

Overjoyed with His beautiful creation. Wowed by His creation. Wowed at having made you. Thrilled with how wonderful you are. Unwavering in love and celebration over you. Here's a picture of God: "The Lord your God

is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17). He delights over you with singing. He rejoices over you in love. God is thrilled with having made you. That doesn't change. Even when you turn your back on Him, God's heart for you never changes. But then when you turn around again... Here's how Jesus put it once in a story about a child who ran away from home then turned around, the Father celebrates: "But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32). I mean, we had to celebrate. We had to party. It's not a choice. It just has to happen. There is so much celebration in God, so much love in God, so much joy in God. He loves you when you have your back turned on Him. But when you turn around again ... Wow.

A beautiful God makes a beautiful world. That's how ***The Beautiful Story*** starts. The Father was there. The Spirit was there. The Son was there. Jesus, the Son, knew what was coming. He would enter into that creation when it had turned its back on the Father. He would become one of us when we were hellbent for shadows and darkness with our backs to the light. He would go into death to rescue us when we turned away from life. He would do that. Never would the celebration be in jeopardy. No. We had to celebrate. We had to be glad. There's too much joy, too much beauty, too much glory to let it slip away. No shrunken stories of this God allowed. God is beautiful.

