**IN THE BEGINNING; GEN. 1, 2:1-9; AUG. 7/22.**

 “In the beginning”, those most familiar words, set the entire Bible in motion. It makes us wonder what existed before the beginning. What was God doing before the beginning? Why did He, as the next words indicate, “create the heavens and the earth”? And as we know today, why is there so much emphasis on the earth, when it is so infinitesimally small in comparison with the universe as a whole?

 Now you can’t venture into this topic without wading into trouble. Many people, and I mean many, are tripped up on this account, and dismiss Christianity because of it. I know, because I was 1 of those people. “With all we know today”, how can anyone believe that God created the earth in 7—make that 6 days, because He rested on the 7th? And it gets Christians on the defensive and causes them to make some funny statements. Well, “since 1,000 years are like a day, perhaps these days are more like 1,000 years. The arguments go back and forth. Stephen Hawking ate Christians for breakfast over this stuff.

 So let’s look at what the Scriptures say and try to get a handle on it. First, there are as many and probably more Christians who don’t believe this Genesis account of creation, than those who do. Many regard it as an allegory, a story of how life began, not a factual account.

 Let’s get a few things out on the table, right from the get-go. The Bible is not, nor was it ever intended to be a book of science. Its purpose was never to detail the scientific phenomena of the beginning of life. Rather, it focuses on God’s relation to humanity and humanity’s relation to God. In other words, the Bible is not written as a biological, geological or astronomical, chronological statement, but as a moral and spiritual guide. The Bible uncovers the history of God’s revelation of Himself and of His will concerning humanity. On the one hand, it is irreconcilable with science, yet as its content implies, it is over science. On the other hand, it differs drastically from all other prescientific accounts of our beginning.

 But we have some puzzling pieces! How is it possible to have a formation of earth be-fore sun, stars & moon? How can there be fruit trees before there is sun? While there are answers, they aren’t accepted by non-believers. I don’t insist you follow me on this; neither is the beginning a matter of salvation. So when people get sidetracked about creation & evolution they’re missing the key to the Biblical message, that “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to humanity by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). I personally don’t have difficulty with God creating the heavens & the earth in 6 days. Though it defies human logic & the natural order of things, God is not natural, nor does He do things in an ordinary way. He was able to speak the cosmos into existence because He is supernatural—over the natural. He created the natural laws; He is not restricted by them. Did anyone else ever walk on water? Peter tried it; without the Lord he was sunk—just like the rest of us!

 The authority of Scripture is vital! Once you start dismissing sections of it, it’s a very slippery slope. Where do you stop? You get into one person’s view being as legitimate as the next person’s view, and before you know it, God’s Word is set aside for human opinion and human wisdom, which is not very wise at the best of times—unless God leads it.

 Getting back to the order of creation and the earth and plants being created before the sun, one need only look at the 2nd last chapter in the Bible. Now that’s kind of a tidy package, looking at the end of the Bible to explain something from the very beginning. In John’s picture of heaven, the New Jerusalem, he says, “the city does not need the sun and the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it” (Rev. 21:23,24). For God, our logistics and natural laws do not make His work impossible.

 For, whether you agree or not, there are undeniable truths here on the origin of the physical universe as well as the origin of life in general & of humanity specifically. The 1st is that there has been a creation such that things now existing have not just “naturally” unfolded of themselves. Marcus Dods expresses it this way: “that [things] have been called into being by a presiding intelligence & an originating will.” The beginning is not about matter & material causes, but about intelligence & purpose.

 This gets us into the controversy over evolution & the theory that adaptations to the environment have led to change, or as Darwin famously coined, “survival of the fittest”. Yet there is ultimately no satisfactory answer to how or why it all began. At the physical level, even if you’re given to believe in “big bang” theory (I’’ve no problem with that), the question remains, what caused it, & perhaps more importantly, where did the matter for the big bang come from. It begs the question to suggest that it simply pre-existed.

 And to move from that into the realm of living, as opposed to inanimate matter, how is it even conceivable that you get life from non-life? How do you ever get conditions randomly to result in life, without intelligent organization? And if there’s intelligent organization, then the whole process is not random. A huge debate rages on this whole topic; frankly, it doesn’t change much when you get right down to it. Whether or not evolution is an accurate depiction of how life has come to be as we presently know it doesn’t change God’s sovereignty over all things; it doesn’t change His creative genius, His love for us or His purpose for us. I’m not missing the fact that atheists who adhere to their picture of life do so with the clear denial of any god having any part in the process. That’s OK. They are free to disagree.

 The Biblical account has a high degree of organization that should not be overlooked. Ten times in Genesis 1 we find the statement that living matter was organized “according to its kind”. It’s a hard statement to ignore. We also hear God acknowledging over & over that God saw His creation, 1st of all, piece by piece, “& it was good” & when He “saw all He had made”, including humanity that was made in His own image, “it was very good”. Not only is there an intelligent creation, which means there’s an intelligent Creator, but there’s a quality to the creation that allows God to speak of it as “good” or “very good”. It’s this word that separates the argument of the “random design” believers from the “intelligent design” believers. Random design doesn’t include purpose or reason; intelligent design, on the other hand is filled with purpose. And that purpose isn’t just survival or adaptation; it’s about a joy-filled life of relation-ship—relationship with the God who established life, relationship with others & the other forms of life and the environment that God has provided.

 The 2nd great truth that the Genesis account reveals is that we are “the chief work of God, for whose sake all else was brought into being.” Creation was not finished until humanity appeared. We are the exclamation mark of this earth. Everything else is made for us & we act on this assumption. Now this is not to say we should act presumptuously over it—environmentalists are quite right in this notion. We’ve collectively created a mess of the environment by systematically & carelessly abusing & selfishly turning all other life & the physical environment into something akin to our playground.

 God’s given us this earth as a sacred trust. He’s established us as stewards of the land & of life. That’s a daunting responsibility & we’ve generally failed quite miserably at “[ruling] over the fish of the sea & the birds of the air & over every living creature that moves on the ground” Who could argue about our track record, when we consider the species we’ve caused to be-come extinct through hunting for selfish purposes or denuding the landscape?

 Though we are lords of the earth in this regard, conversely we can see how totally insignificant we are when we gaze out on the universe. Who are we to have any pride when we look at the larger picture? David worded it well in Psalm 8: “When I consider Your heavens the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place, what is humanity that You are mindful of us [or care for us]?”

 So how is it that on this speck called earth the greatest act of God is played out? We’ve been created in His image, made in the likeness of God. God hasn’t just created the cosmos, with us as a central part of it & then just left us to do our thing, while He cares only for keeping it moving in its proper way, with heavenly bodies & systems traveling in their proper orbits. While God does look after the entire cosmos, nevertheless, we’re not too insignificant for Him to care for us. If we think otherwise, we misunderstand His relation to the world, & miss the real value of spirit as compared with matter. We’re dear to God because we are like Him.

 Marcus Dods says: “Vast & glorious as it is, the sun cannot think God’s thoughts; can fulfil but cannot intelligently sympathize with God’s purpose. Man, alone among God’s works, can enter into & approve of God’s purpose in the world & can intelligently fulfil it. Without man the whole material universe would have been dark & unintelligible, mechanical & appar-ently without any sufficient purpose. Matter, however fearfully & wonderfully wrought, is but the platform & material in which spirit, intelligence, & will may fulfil themselves & find develop-ment. Man…is of a different kind by & his moral nature is more akin to God than to His works.”

 As mind-boggling as the vast creation is, it’s all meaningless & unintelligible without the incarnation. All creation points to the Incarnation. All creation is a preparation for God revealing Himself as a Person to people. This is an end that’s worthy of all the physical history of the world. In Jesus, God revealed Himself personally, shedding light on all that’s been & is.

 Are you living as if you were the product of a random universe or the recipient of grace? God has given you a person—Jesus—who’s worthy of throwing your life to. Be conformed to His image. Be transformed by His grace. Persevere for what is truly life. Keep your eyes on Jesus, the author & perfecter of your faith! He’s the meaning of your existence! There is a purpose in things: in Christ you can see what that purpose is & by uniting with Him & cooperating with the Holy Spirit you can participate with Him in working out that purpose! Reflect on that this week & pray for God’s leading & understanding of His purpose for you. Share it with others.