

Why I'm a Christian

Week 5

We are to the end of our 5-week series, looking at why as Christians we believe the things we do. We've talked about the existence of God, the resurrection of Jesus, the trustworthiness of the bible, and the nature of doubt. The whole time, you guys have been sending in question and through those questions, you got to decide what the sermon is about today. The original plan was to take 3 questions and make their answers the sermon content, but I actually changed my mind. You guys asked a lot of questions all around one specific topic and I thought it would be more beneficial to give a more thorough answer instead of a cursory one. So we are just going to answer one grouping of questions.

Shameless plug - if you want to hear some answers to different questions, our other Midtown churches are answering different ones today and those will be available on the website.

Here is the grouping of questions yall sent in:

- What is the Creator-based view of evolution (dinosaurs and all)?
- What is the age of the earth? When did humans come?
- Does Midtown believe in the Long Day theory? How do we explain seeing light from stars that are millions of years old, if the Earth is only thousands of years old?
- No, but seriously...did dinosaurs exist?
- Does the Bible say/infer that the Big Bang didn't happen? Or should I believe that God used the Big Bang to create the earth? I basically want to know the best way to explain things to my kids.
- How does the Bible interact with the theory of evolution?

Good questions. A few different specifics are being asked here and I want to group them all together.

Our topic for today: **Jurassic Park or Genesis, who's lying?**

-First, a preliminary statement.

This is, what I would call, an in-house debate. If you're not a Christian, this isn't where to start. Because bible believing, Jesus loving Christians disagree and have for a long time. Start with Jesus, his life, his teaching, specifically his death and resurrection. If you come to believe that he is who he says he is and did what he claims to have done, then we can move into all sorts of questions that might come up. Including this one. Our church does not have an official stance, because we think there are a few viable options.

The most important reason why there are a few viable options is because of the genre.

Genre -

If you found something I wrote in middle school, where I wrote to my ex-girlfriend:

Roses are red

Violets are blue

My heart is broken

because of you.

Would you interpret that to be me claiming that the organ that pumps blood inside my body is now in multiple pieces because of a middle school girl?

You would not. Because you know that it's poetry. Not good poetry, but poetry nonetheless. So you know that my words are not meant to be taken literally but instead are metaphorical. I am communicating something that is true, but if you take my words literally then you are interpreting me to be saying something that I am not actually intending to say.

Your knowledge of the genre helps you understand how I want to be interpreted. This is true for all writing, including scripture. We have to seek to take the writer as he or she wants to be taken. That is how we respect biblical authority. We ask, "how does this author want to be understood?"

Let me give you an example.

In Song of Solomon, Solomon says to his wife...

Song of Solomon 7:2

Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies.

Is he saying that her belly button is a wine tap and her abdomen has somehow turned into grain with flowers growing out of it?

Of course not, it's figurative, poetic language. This is ancient sexy talk.

Contrast that with Luke, who begins his writings by saying he has interviewed eyewitnesses and is writing a historical account of the life of Jesus. So we interpret Luke's writings as historical narrative.

All of that brings us to Genesis 1. I'd like to read the entire chapter with you. And actually also the first 3 verses of chapter 2 because they are conclusion. All 34 verses, because I want you to get the whole feel of it, in its entirety. I will read fast.

Genesis 1

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8 And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

11 And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. 12 The earth brought

forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. 16 And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17 And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

20 And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." 21 So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. 25 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Chapter 2

1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

What we just read is an ancient Mesopotamian poem. It has refrains, repeated statements that are repeated as in a song. Here is the rough pattern.

1. Announcement: "And God said."
2. Commandment: "Let there be."
3. Separation: God separated the day and night, water and land, animals and plants.
4. Report: "And it was so."
5. Evaluation: "And God saw that it was good."

But here is the tricky part. We aren't exactly sure how we are supposed to interpret this style of writing. It is certainly a poem of sorts. Potentially we are supposed to interpret it literally. The exact

words are exactly what happened. Potentially we are supposed interpret it more like modern poetry, seeing it as more figurative, metaphorical language. We always want to use the rest of the bible to interpret the bible, but even doing that, Christians sometimes come to different conclusions about Genesis 1.

So let me give you, very broadly, some of the different views, including some strengths and weaknesses of that view. As I do this, I am hoping to be fair and give honest strengths and weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses have answers or counterpoints and if I don't mention all of the counterpoints for your view, please forgive me as God in Christ has forgiven you.

1 - Naturalistic evolution - Evolution without God. Not a Christian position. "Evolution as an explanation for everything"

Strengths - The observational evidence seemingly pointing to common ancestry. Fossil record. Biogeography. Genetics.

Weaknesses - some of these we discussed in week 1 of our series.

Cosmological argument. - both something from nothing, as well as life from non-life is very much unexplained in this view.

Cell theory - the well-established fact that cells come from pre-existing cells. Except for this once.

Teleological argument. Moral argument. The argument from desire. Human consciousness, reliability of math, human language all are challenges. Not without some theories to answer them, but challenges nonetheless.

And biblical problems, the whole bible. This is quite obviously not a Christian view.

2 - Evolutionary creationism. Sometimes called theistic evolution.

God guided the process of evolution. God is Creator and the means by which he created was the process of evolution.

The Psalmist says, "you knit me together in my mother's womb" (Ps 139:13) he was not saying that he hadn't developed in the perfectly normal biological ways. It is a figurative way to say that God instituted and guided the biological process of human formation in his mother's womb. So when we are told that God 'formed Adam from the dust of the ground' (Gen 2:7), the author might be speaking figuratively in the same way, meaning that God brought man into being through normal biological processes.

Strengths - The observational evidence seemingly pointing to common ancestry. Fossil record. Biogeography. Genetics.

It also solves each of the weaknesses mentioned above regarding naturalistic evolution. God as the great cause, God as the fine tuner, God as the one who writes his laws on our hearts, and so forth.

Weaknesses -

The weaknesses of this view are mostly biblical.

Such as,

-when did Adam and Eve appear? The rest of the bible, including Jesus and Paul, seem to say that Adam and Eve are historical people. If God guided the process of evolution then at what point did Adam and Eve come about and in what sense were they the first humans?

-in what sense are Adam and Eve “in God’s image?” When other humans or close approximations have come and gone before them.

-What does it mean that sin brought death. Is that simply spiritual? The process of evolution necessitates death. Now, no matter what, we know that we have animals eating plants before sin enters in Genesis 3, so death on some level was in fact happening already.

There are some questions here that are difficult to square with particular parts of the bible.

3 - Old Earth Creationism

Couple of ways that this gets explained.

-Potentially a long space of time between God’s initial creation of the earth in vs 1 and then the 6 days of particular creation in the rest of the chapter. Sometimes called the “gap theory.”

Others who hold to Old Earth Creationism would argue that In Genesis 1 the Hebrew term for “days” is “aeons.” One way of rendering that word is “day” is “epochs” or “ages.”

They would say that the seven “days” actually represent seven stages of creation. In other words, the days of Genesis 1 are extremely long “ages” of time which could overlap with a process of God-guided evolution potentially.

Strengths - Agrees with the current scientific estimate for an Earth 4.5 Billion years old is correct, it explains how the Bible is consistent with this aging.

Weaknesses:

Gap theory - fossils, like dinosaurs, predating humans. Some would challenge the dating system among other answers.

Day-Age theory - photosynthesis is a challenge.

I don’t know if you noticed as we read earlier in Gen 1, Day 3 is where vegetation is created. The Sun is Day 4. If those are long periods of time and not literal days, it would mean that there was an entire era of history where plants did not live by the process of photosynthesis.

Now, all things are possible with God, but we know that’s not how plants normally work. So it’s a challenge.

4 - Young Earth Creationism -

Literal seven days creation period. Earth is only thousands of years old.

Strengths - The adulthood of Adam and Eve is solid evidence for this position. The original creation was created with an “appearance of age”. God creates Adam and Eve as adults, he doesn’t make them as babies. He creates mature trees and other plants and animals. If you showed up the day after Adam and Eve were created they would have been adults but if you asked them how old they were, they would say 2 days old. The trees were created with an appearance of age. The rocks were created with an appearance of age.

-Also, those who hold to this view would say that the Flood in Genesis 7 would have had profound effects on fossil records and our dating system.

-In this view, people existed alongside dinosaurs...which does sound pretty great. That's just in there because of how cool it sounds.

Weaknesses - The observational evidence seemingly pointing to common ancestry. Fossil record. Biogeography. Genetics.

More specifically...

- Starlight. Another challenge with this view is starlight. For example, the Andromeda Galaxy is 2.5 million light-years away. Therefore, the light from it that we see right now is 2.5 million years old. If creation is only thousands of years old, then how are we seeing light that old?

- This requires an explanation for the appearance that dinosaurs existed long before people. Did God create the earth with fossils already placed? That seems strange. Potentially the flood in Genesis 7 accounts for this.

- Biblical difficulties. If we are strictly literal about the Genesis 1 text, how are there nights and days before the sun? Nights and days are Day 1, sun is Day 4.

- No death until the first sin? Plants were eaten though. Did bacteria die before? Insects. It wouldn't take long for insects to make the world uninhabitable.

So those are really broad teams, there are many subcategories within these and different nuances to them. But that gives you the idea. And as I've said, each view has its strengths and weaknesses. There is no view that has no challenges. Bible scholars and Christian scientists hold different views regarding this topic that's ok.

One of the things I would caution you against is pitting God against science. Science, properly understood, is just the developing understanding of the world God made. Let's make sure to avoid what is sometimes called "a god of the gaps." Meaning, when we don't understand how something works, then that's what God is doing.

I have a friend who told me he had a family disagreement a while ago, where his son asked where does wind come from. And his wife said correctly, "God makes the wind!" And he was sitting there thinking correctly, "wind is caused by air flowing from high pressure to low pressure. Differences in atmospheric pressure are where the wind comes from..."

The truth is, they were both right. God makes the wind and he does it by air flowing from high pressure to low pressure.

These are not competing ideas. We don't only need God when something is otherwise unexplainable, otherwise, we will be hesitant to seek out explanations and further discovery.

Johannes Kepler German mathematician and astronomer. Was a key figure in the scientific revolution. Once described all of his scientific work as "thinking God's thoughts after him."

So you might be wondering which of these views on creation I line up with. I'm not gonna tell you. I was planning to but then I told some folks on our staff and they immediately all wanted to debate with me and honestly I don't care enough to want those problems. If you want to know and you come to ask me in person, I will be glad to tell you but I'm not gonna say it into a microphone and then have to deal with people arguing with me.

I tried my best to present each view fairly and hopefully, you couldn't tell which one I find most plausible. That was my goal.

Our church doesn't have a particular team because we can see how people might arrive at any of the theories that involve God as Creator, regardless of the process.

But I do want to end by affirming some key points regarding the doctrine of creation.

-God is the main agent in creation. Nature is not the deciding power in existence. The God who created nature is. He is creator, we are creation.

-People are God's special creation. We are his image bearers on the earth.

Special dignity and worth compared to the rest of creation. Yet among people, we have equal dignity and worth, regardless of skills or abilities, gender, race, socioeconomic status. Without God as main creative agent, you can assert human rights but you can't truly argue for it.

-God made it "good" and sin is our problem

Do we need better government? Yes.

Do we need better parenting? Yes.

Do we need whole families, together? Yes.

Do we need better education? Yes.

Do people need role models? Yes.

But each of these things are only dealing with problems at the symptom level. Sin is the root cause.

This is the story of the bible, God sending a savior to put back together what sin has broken.

So while Christians might disagree on some issues, including evolution and creation, there is no disagreement that we need Jesus. I need Jesus. You need Jesus. Your neighbor needs Jesus. Your spouse needs Jesus. Your kids need Jesus. Rich people need Jesus. Poor people need Jesus. Republicans need Jesus. Democrats need Jesus. Everyone needs Jesus.

So while there might not be total certainty around some secondary issues of our faith, there is total certainty around Jesus. And that seems like the right way to end our series.

So we will end our teaching this morning as we always do...by going to Jesus. To praise him, worship him, pray to him, draw near to him. We'll receive communion as we remember him and what he's done to pay for sin and reconcile us to God.