

## "IN THE BEGINNING GOD"

Genesis 1:1-31

The first book of the Bible is one of the most interesting and fascinating portions of Scripture. It is essentially and pre-eminently a book of beginnings.

There is something peculiarly striking in the manner in which the Holy Spirit opens this sublime book. He introduces us at once to God, in the essential fulness of His Being and the solitariness of His acting. It is to God that we are brought. The first four words form the keynote of the book. They tell us that God is and that He always was. They do not say that God was from the beginning, but, when the beginning began, God was already. He was before the beginning. He was already in existence. The very first sentence in the divine canon sets us in the presence of Him Who is the infinite source of all true blessedness. There is no elaborate argument in proof of the existence of God. Creation assumes the existence of God, the eternity of God, the omnipotence of God, the freedom of God, the wisdom of God and the goodness of God.

This opening sentence, "In the beginning God created," informs us that He is a personal Being. To "create" is to make something out of nothing; to give being to that which before was not; to bring into being without the use of pre-existing material. To "make" is to form something out of materials already existing. For example, a carpenter can make a chair out of wood, but he is unable to create the wood itself.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." That is all that is recorded here concerning the original creation. Nothing is said which enables us to fix the date of their creation; nothing is revealed concerning their appearance or inhabitants; nothing is told us about the manner in which the Divine Architect operated. The bare fact is stated, and nothing is added to gratify the curious. This opening sentence of the Holy Writ is not to be philosophized about, but it is presented as a statement of truth to be received with unquestioning faith. Coming fresh from the Creator, the heaven and the earth must have presented a scene of unequalled freshness and beauty.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." That is perhaps the most sublime and comprehensive sentence in our language. Although the very essence of simplicity, it stands unequalled in profound significance. It brings before us the living and omnipotent God, the first Source and Cause of all things. By so doing, it sets aside at one stroke the seven great fundamental heresies which have misled the minds of men.

1. Atheism.  
Atheism affirms that there is no God, but this verse reveals that there is.
2. Deism.  
Deism declares that God cannot reveal Himself, but the universe of this verse is a revelation of His eternal power and Godhead.
3. Agnosticism.  
Agnosticism says that there may, or may not, be a God, but as design implies a designer so creation implies a Creator.
4. Materialism.  
Materialism proclaims the eternity of matter, but this verse says that in the beginning God created it. The fact that God created the heaven and the earth proves that matter is not eternal, that it was not begun by blind force, that it did not start itself, but that it had a definite origin and came into existence by the creative fiat of God.
5. Pantheism.

Pantheism says that there is no God but the universe. We read here that the universe was summoned into existence by His power.

6. Polytheism.

Polytheism affirms that creation is the work of many gods, but that is disproved by the unity of nature. The same sun shines everywhere; the same laws of gravitation hold everywhere.

7. Rationalism.

Rationalism refused to believe anything that transcends reason, but, as man was not in existence at the time to which this first verse in the Bible refers, the statement must be received by faith. It is through faith we understand, and faith, while ever unreasoning, is never unreasonable.

Coming now to the words themselves, we find that they answer three questions:

1. What was created?

The answer is "the heaven and the earth."

2. Who created them?

The answer is "God."

3. When were they created?

The answer is "In the beginning," which means in the dateless past.

We should not expect a real answer to the question, How did God create? We shall not get an answer to the question how? in relation to the activity of God. His activity, like His Being and His power, are incomprehensible to us, except in so far as He has chosen to reveal them. Why did God create? "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11). Creation is for God's pleasure. This at once gives meaning and direction to our own lives. We are created for God's pleasure, and we ought to live for it. It is wonderful to remember that creation, so far as personal beings are concerned, was an act of love.

Whether the description in verse two, "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," applies to the state of the earth at the moment when God created it or was its condition at some later period, after a longer or shorter interval had elapsed, cannot be determined from the text. It is characteristic of the Bible to pass over in silence long periods of time.

God did not abandon the earth which He had created. He had gracious designs toward that formless void. In bringing about His purpose, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

The parallel with God's creative act of grace in the regeneration of the sinner, which is found throughout this chapter, begins with this verse. The natural man in his sinful fallen state is without form. His life is purposeless, unrelated to the aim of God in making him and unrecognizable as formed in the image of God. He is also void, that is to say empty, without faith, without love, without hope, without God and without the highest manhood. His life is full of darkness. Sin is spiritual darkness. He knows nothing of the light of life. He is blind and groping. In the life of the natural man this darkness is upon the face of the deep.

The Spirit of God was present with the Father and the Son in the process of creation. It is He Who works upon the sinner's heart while still in darkness and death, to convict him of sin and to point him to the Saviour. So here He moves upon the face of the waters. He does not indwell them. He is not within the world, but He is outside it, moving over it. In the same way He is not within the sinner till the moment of salvation. He is working upon him, and the heart which is spiritually dead is no more conscious of His working than were the waters of primeval earth.

God's work during the six days is as follows:

1. The first day God created light. Genesis 1:3-5.  
The first movement of God's creative power towards the earth was the bringing of light into being. The primeval light shone out instantaneously when God's Word was spoken. In the spiritual creation of the individual there is a moment when the soul passes from darkness to light, from death to life.

God saw the light. Man can see objects with the aid of light. God can see the light itself, and not only see it but form an estimate of it. God saw that the light was good or that it corresponded perfectly to His design and will. To see that it was good means to take pleasure in it. What could it be but good, coming, as it did, from the hand of God?

God caused an alternation of darkness and light. They had their boundaries fixed, and were called night and day. The division was then made which still continues. The evening is mentioned first because darkness came before light. The Hebrew day began with the evening at sunset and ran till the following sunset.

2. The second day God created the firmament. Genesis 1:6-8.  
Apparently the firmament is the space or atmosphere between the waters beneath it and the clouds above it, without which nothing in the animal or vegetable kingdom can live.
3. The third day God created dry land and vegetation. Genesis 1:9-13.  
The expression, "Let the earth bring forth" implies that the Creator had placed within the ground the potentialities of plant life. All vegetation is dependent upon the soil. Observe the three great divisions of the vegetable kingdom--grasses, herbs and trees. Grass is short lived and withers away. It is a picture of the fallen human life in the flesh. It speaks to us of death and reminds us that life is short. The second kind of vegetation is the herb. This is edible. It can nourish and build up others. It yields seed. Thus it has the power to increase itself and perhaps to sow itself in the hearts of others. The third kind is the tree. Tree is a generic term. Many kinds were created. Each brings forth fruit after his kind. Each kind is needed to make up the variety and beauty of creation.
4. The fourth day God created the sun, moon and stars. Genesis 1:14-19.  
God called these heavenly bodies into existence because there was a need for illumination. He has always anticipated the needs of man. These heavenly bodies--sun, moon and stars--were designed for certain definite purposes. Nothing was created without a specific purpose in view. Man may learn from God the fact that life has been imparted for a purpose. If a person does not fulfill the purpose for which he was created, he is a failure.

What are some of the purposes for which these bodies were designed?

- (1) To separate the day from the night.
- (2) To be for signs.

This is intelligible in an agricultural community. The position of the sun gives the sign for plowing or sowing. Farmers still speak of spring sowing or autumn sowing. Thus the heavenly bodies provide guidance to the farmer.

(3) To be for seasons.

The revolution of the earth around the sun causes the alternation of the seasons, necessary for the healthy growth of crops and probably necessary for the health of animals and men.

(4) To be for days.

The rotation of the earth, causing the apparent rising and setting of the sun, brings about the alternation of day and night with its fundamental influence upon human and animal life.

(5) To be for years.

The round of seasons brings about the solar year, one revolution of the earth around the sun, by which we reckon years in modern times.

(6) To give light.

Darkness is the natural condition of the universe. These lights are placed in the firmament to illuminate the world. This illumination has a great value.

The sun is the great center of light. Around it the lesser orbs revolve. From it they derive their light. The sun is the symbol of Christ. The moon derives its light from the sun. It reflects the light of the sun, except when the earth and its influences intervene. No sooner does the sun sink beneath the horizon than the moon appears to receive its beams and reflect them upon a dark world. Should the moon be visible during the day, it only reflects a pale light, because it is appearing in the presence of superior brightness. Sometimes the dark clouds, thick mists and chilling vapors arise and intervene to hide its silvery light from the view of people here. As the sun is a symbol of Christ, so the moon reminds us of the churches. In like manner the stars represent individual Christians.

5. The fifth day God created the fish and the birds. Genesis 1:20-23.

The aquatic life inhabits the liquid deep. The conception brought before us is that of a sudden filling of the oceans with living creatures of a thousand kinds by the word and act of God. By virtue of God's creation the waters swarmed with living creatures. The waters brought forth abundantly after their kind. The word "moving" in verse twenty distinguishes between animal and plant life. Plants are rooted in the earth and fixed to one spot. Animals are free to move about within the limits that God has fixed for them.

At the word of God the air was filled with birds, as the waters had been filled with sea-creatures. The birds fly in that part of the great expanse of heaven that is immediately above the earth. The sea-creatures and the birds were each created "after his kind." This implies that a variety of separate creations was made and that the "kinds" could not and cannot interbreed. God's blessing gave these creatures the power of reproduction. He had made His world to be inhabited, and He intended that the sea should be filled with fish and the air stocked with birds. God saw that every creature He had made would some way or other be for His glory and for the benefit of man.

At the close of the fifth day, God did that which He had not done on any of the other four days. He blessed that which He had created, and the object of His blessing was an abundant and perpetual increase. God is liberal in His donations, whether they be spiritual or temporal. When He gives peace, it is a peace that passeth all understanding. When He gives joy, it is an unspeakable joy. When He gives pleasures, they are pleasures for evermore. When He gives glory, it is an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

6. The sixth day God created the land animals and man. Genesis 1:24-31. Like the fish and birds the land animals appeared after their kind, in a variety of different forms, separated from each other by strict lines of demarcation.

The creation of man was preceded by a divine consultation. The Trinity conferred regarding the creation of man. The project was considered thoroughly, and the issues were contemplated, after which it was decreed to bring man into existence.

To whom was God speaking when He said, "Let us make man." There is only one answer that fits both the words, "God said," and the plural pronoun "Us." This verse is one of the most outstanding foreshadowings in the Old Testament of the doctrine of the Trinity in unity. One Person of the Godhead is addressing another.

The first word used in connection with the bringing of man into being is the word make. This suggests that material already in existence was used in the making of man. The next chapter tells us that the material from which he was made was the dust of the ground, and the next verse, by the use of the word "create," implies that man had no physical relationship with any creature that preceded him.

God's act followed His decision in that man was created in the image of God. What God purposes, as what He promises, He is able to, does and will ever perform to the glory of His name and the eternal good of His people. God spoke the word, and man's being was a fact. Man was accorded a great privilege in being made to conform to the image of his Maker. That man was created in the image of God is a fact well attested. This fact is fully corroborated by the Word of God. It is not the invention of a deluded intellect. It is not a pipe dream. It is indeed a fact that is confirmed by the Creator. Man's greatest glory is not his ancestry, not his wealth and not his fame, but it is the fact that he was created in the image of God. Of all God's creatures, he alone has been accorded that exalted position of greatness and glory. Man's greatest glory is realized in his dedication to God of time, talents and means. The image and likeness plainly have reference to the fact that man was made like God in that he thinks, feels and wills. Man does not have a physical likeness to God, but a mental, moral and social likeness.

Made in the image of God, man has some duties which cannot be overlooked. It is the duty of man to replenish the earth. The curse of sin brought forth the necessity for multiplying and replenishing the earth. When people fail in the task assigned to them, the human race is in danger of becoming extinct. We cannot escape our responsibility for carrying on the human race. It is also the duty of man to subdue the earth. Moreover, it is the duty of man to rule the earth. To him falls the responsibility of maintaining a semblance of order. Man has miserably failed in his duty to rule the earth because of selfishness, greed and hatred.

Verse twenty-nine shows us God's first gracious provision for man's need. The herbs and trees belong to God by virtue of their having been made by Him. They are given by Him to man. This first dealing of God with man is characteristic of all. God always gives and never sells. Fallen man constantly attempts to buy spiritual gifts from God by religious observances or by the veneration of a decent life. God gives what man needs physically and much else besides. He gives home and health, the beauties of nature, intellectual pleasures, the delights of craftsmanship and a thousand other things. His spiritual gifts cannot be numbered. When at last nothing else could meet the sinner's need, God gave the unspeakable gift of His only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

When God surveyed all that He had made in those first six days, He saw that His works were complete and very excellent.