



The Story of Creation

Summary and Goal

The all-powerful God merely spoke and brought the universe into existence. Every snow-capped Alpine peak and every island paradise, every jungle cat, leviathan of the sea, and mosquito in your backyard was made in the wisdom and knowledge of an intelligent design and for a specific purpose—God’s glory.

Main Passages

John 1:10-13; Psalm 33:6-9

Session Outline

1. The Glory of God in Creation (John 1:10b; Psalm 33:6-9; Genesis 1)
2. The Wonder of God as Trinity (John 1:10b; John 1:1-3)
3. The Mystery of God Incarnate (John 1:10a, 11a, 14a)

Theological Theme

God is the Creator of the heavens and earth. Every atom, cell, and grain of sand finds its origin in God. God is also Trinity, that is, God is one essence expressed in three distinct persons. God has also come as the Son, taking on flesh. This doctrine is especially central to the story of God’s costly plan to redeem His people.

Christ Connection

Christ had a central role in Creation, has a divine nature, and came to the earth humbly on our behalf.

Missional Application

As we seek to be imitators of God (Eph 5:1) and obey His explicit commands to go (i.e. Matthew 28:19), we need to look no further than the Creator, Triune God, who completed the mission to redeem us by emptying Himself and assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity.

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30-31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God's people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve ("the disciple Jesus loved," 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24-25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of "the disciple Jesus loved" with Peter in 13:23-24; 18:15-16; 20:2-9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3-4; 8:14-25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John's Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1-4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John's lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas's confession of Jesus as "my Lord and my God" in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter's martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1,14,18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John's Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

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Session Plan

The Story of Creation

Introduction

- ? How would you answer if someone asked you why is it important to know and understand the doctrines of the Christian faith?
- ? Have you experienced the reality that the gospel is simple enough for a child to understand but complex enough to never been completely understood? How has this impacted you?

Our primary text in this lesson (and the next three lessons) is John 1:10-13. In this study we will focus particularly on verses 10 (He was in the world, and the world was created through him) and 11 (He came to his own). These clauses are packed with theological truth that is worthy of our attention.




1. The Glory of God in Creation (John 1:10b; Psalm 33:6-9; Genesis 1)

The purpose of John's Gospel was to show his readers that Jesus is the Christ so that they would believe. In John 1:10-13 there are two foundational questions that John sought to address: 1) Who was Jesus? and 2) What did He do? These two questions depend upon each other to be answered from John's perspective. If we know what Jesus did, then it will be obvious who He is. And if we know who Jesus is, then the meaning of what He did will be clear.

- ? What did John say that Jesus did in verse 10b? What is this significant?
- ? Read Psalm 33:6-9. What part of this passage do you find the most striking, surprising? Why?
- ? Consider Genesis 1 in light of John's revelation. What attributes of God do we see in Genesis 1? How do these also apply to Jesus?
- ? Application: What does the truth of Genesis 1 have to do with how we live our lives today?



2. The Wonder of God as Trinity (John 1:10b; John 1:1-3)

The doctrine of creation is simple yet profound. It's simple because even a child can comprehend that God made us. It is profound because we will spend the rest of our days contemplating and beholding the mystery of God's eternity, power, and goodness. It won't be until we pass from this life to the next that we fully appreciate and grasp our complete dependence upon an independent self-sufficient Being. The mystery only deepens when we overlay John's words with what we know about creation and the Creator.



-  What does John tell us about creation in 1:10b? What does this mean? How are we to understand Jesus' role in creation?
-  What is the orthodox understanding of Jesus being fully God? What does the Bible teach about this question?
-  Application: How can I pray, sing, read Scripture, and live in a way that accurately reflects my relationship to all three persons of the Trinity?

3. The Mystery of God Incarnate (John 1:10a, 11a, 14a)

We have already considered God's glory in creation and the wonder of the Trinity. Now, let's think about one more fundamental truth about God that is both simple and deeper than we can fathom. John wrote, "He was in the world" (10a). And then in verse 11a "He came to his own." Finally, in verse 14a, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

-  What truth did John want to convey to his readers? What does it mean, exactly, that God the Son took on flesh?
-  Application: How does the reality of the incarnation change the way that you understand and treasure the gospel? How might you live in a way that truly shows that the good news of the incarnate Jesus is truly precious to you?

Conclusion

-  If God owns what He creates, what does it mean to belong to God? If people looked at your calendar, checkbook, or your browser history would they conclude that you belong to God? What needs to change?
-  If you are a Christian, does your life mirror His humility and service to others? Who are those that you serve? Do you expect to be served or do you look for ways to serve others?

For Further Discussion

What are some ways that you can expand your theological understanding of the Trinity so that you will better understand and appreciate the work of the Triune God on your behalf?





Expanded Session Content

The Story of Creation

Introduction

Have you ever heard of the Atlas Stones? These are part of the World's Strongest Man competition. The concept is simple. The object is to pick up a ball and set it on top of a pillar. No big deal, right? Wrong. The spheres are solid cement, and the smallest one weighs 220 lbs. When a competitor sets a stone on top of the pillar, he then moves on to the next one, which is heavier. The final stone weighs more than 350 lbs. The Atlas Stone competition is a perfect example of something that is very easy to understand in its concept (putting a rock on a table), but very difficult in its application and mastery.

In the next several weeks, we have our own Atlas Stone to deal with. We will allow the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts through the inspired words of John 1:10-13. The truth of this is so simple even a child can understand it, but its application and mastery will take a lifetime. These are weighty doctrines, but the work to know and obey them is not in vain. As we humble ourselves under God's glorious character and work on our behalf, our souls are nourished and we are filled with joy and peace.

-  How would you answer if someone asked you why is it important to know and understand the doctrines of the Christian faith?
-  Have you experienced the reality that the gospel is simple enough for a child to understand but complex enough to never been completely understood? How has this impacted you?

Session Summary

The Bible is so much more than a random collection of interesting writings and inspiring characters. The Bible, rather, is a cohesive, comprehensive narrative that details the person and work of God Almighty, especially His kindness and mercy toward His people in Christ Jesus.

Many of us have viewed the Bible as little more than a collection of stories and poems as opposed to a single, comprehensive narrative. John opened his Gospel by clarifying that the story of Jesus is more than a manger and some wise men, more than the miracles and sermons of Jesus' three-year ministry, and more even than the cross as a single event. We will use John 1:10-13 as a framework to explore the meta-narrative of God's Word: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

Our primary text in this lesson (and the next three lessons) is John 1:10-13. In this study we will focus particularly on verses 10 (He was in the world, and the world was created through him) and 11 (He came to his own). These clauses are packed with theological truth that is worthy of our attention.

1. The Glory of God in Creation (John 1:10b; Psalm 33:6-9; Genesis 1)

The purpose of John's Gospel was to show his readers that Jesus is the Christ so that they would believe. In John 1:10-13 there are two foundational questions that John sought to address: 1) Who was Jesus? and 2) What did He do? These two questions depend upon each other to be answered from John's perspective. If we know what Jesus did, then it will be obvious who He is. And if we know who Jesus is, then the meaning of what He did will be clear.



What did John say that Jesus did in verse 10b? What is this significant?

John said, "and the world was created through Him." In verse 3 he commented, "All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created." Jesus, John asserted, is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, making Him God. John affirmed the deity of Jesus Christ.

We will spend more time with the doctrine of the deity of Christ in the next section. For now, simply consider the importance and weight of the act of the creation of all things. The question of where we came from, of how all that we know and see came to be is foundational and imminently important. Our belief about our origin is one of the key pillars upon which faith is established. If Christians fail to undergird their theology of Christ and salvation with the biblical teaching of origins then their faith rests on shaky ground.



Read Psalm 33:6-9. What part of this passage do you find the most striking, surprising? Why?

If you are looking for a passage upon which to meditate concerning the power and glory of God in creation, Psalm 33 is an excellent place to begin. The thrust of verses 6-9 is the omnipotence of God in creation. The psalmist reveled in the fact that God created by speaking. All that we know and see came into being by the power of God's Word. In a matter of four verses, the writer worked this truth in three times. Anytime we see repetition in Scripture we ought to take note. It usually means that this is something that the reader should give special attention to. Why would this point of creation be important? Because if it is true it shapes the very way in which we view the world. If God is the fountain of all, then He is our Lord and our God. If He created all things by merely speaking, then His power is unfathomable. In short, if what the psalmist said here is true then the proper response is worship.

Now consider what John was saying. God has walked among humanity. This Creator was born in a manger, was hung on a cross, and rose again on the third day. This all-powerful deity who is our Lord and our God, who is worthy of limitless worship, is Jesus.



Consider Genesis 1 in light of John's revelation. What attributes of God do we see in Genesis 1? How do these also apply to Jesus?

In Genesis 1, God's glory is on full display. We see His eternity (no beginning and no end), goodness, power, order, and wisdom as He established the heavens and the earth. In addition to creating the physical realm, He also created spiritual beings. He created angels to worship and serve Him. They were very beautiful and good. And they shouted for joy when God brought the world into being (Job 38:7).

God, the Creator and Sustainer of everyone and everything is eternal and infinite. His power, justice, and wisdom are unchangeable. Nothing happens except through His will.



Application: What does the truth of Genesis 1 have to do with how we live our lives today?

2. The Wonder of God as Trinity (John 1:10b; John 1:1-3)

The doctrine of creation is simple yet profound. It's simple because even a child can comprehend that God made us. It is profound because Christians will spend the rest of their days contemplating and beholding the mystery of God's eternity, power, and goodness. It won't be until those in Christ pass from this life to the next that they will fully appreciate and grasp their complete dependence upon an independent self-sufficient Being. The mystery only deepens when we overlay John's words with what we know about creation and the Creator.



What does John tell us about creation in 1:10b? What does this mean? How are we to understand Jesus' role in creation?

“The world was created through him.” Jesus was present and participated in the creation of all things. Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, “For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16).

There is no doubt that John meant that Jesus is divine—God Himself. This isn't only John's testimony, but it is also the testimony of all of the New Testament, all of the Apostles, all of the early church fathers, and the church throughout all of Christian history. Jesus is God. But that still leaves us with a bit of a quandary because to say that Jesus is God doesn't make clear what that means in relation to the rest of Scripture.

There are two primary errors that Christians make at this point. The first is to assume that Jesus is God and that means that Jesus is God the Father and Jesus is also God the Holy Spirit. The second error is to believe that Jesus is a God, but so is God the Father and also the Holy Spirit. This error basically pictures Christianity as having three gods. (By the way, this is the accusation that Muslims make against Christianity. That's why having this question clearly established in our hearts is essential as we seek to share the gospel with our Muslim neighbors).



What is the orthodox understanding of Jesus being fully God? What does the Bible teach about this question?

Christians hold to the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible expresses throughout that God is three persons but one essence. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are the same in substance and equal in power and glory. It may be helpful to think of this doctrine in terms of seven simple statements:

1. There is only one God.
2. The Father is God.
3. The Son is God.
4. The Holy Spirit is God.
5. The Father is not the Son.
6. The Son is not the Spirit.
7. The Spirit is not the Father.

The doctrine of the trinity is often pushed aside because it seems too daunting, too confusing. But it is absolutely essential to the Christian faith. Even if we get the basic idea of what the doctrine of the Trinity is, we may feel as though it doesn't have much application to our lives. We tend to think that it is just a theological term that has no bearing in an ordinary Christian's life. But it does.

Think about the work of salvation. The Father appoints, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies. We also may consider the ways in which the three persons of the Trinity work for the good of mankind. The Father is Creator and Sustainer. The Son is Redeemer and Savior. The Holy Spirit is Sanctifier and Perfecter.



Application: How can Christians pray, sing, read Scripture, and live in a way that accurately reflects their relationship to all three persons of the Trinity?

3. The Mystery of God Incarnate (John 1:10a, 11a, 14a)

We have already considered God's glory in creation and the wonder of the Trinity. Now, let's think about one more fundamental truth about God that is both simple and deeper than we can fathom. John wrote, "He was in the world" (10a). And then in verse 11a "He came to his own." Finally, in verse 14a, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."



What truth did John want to convey to his readers? What does it mean, exactly, that God the Son took on flesh?

John explained the profound truth that God the Son humbled Himself and took on human flesh. "Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity" (Philippians 2:7). This doctrine is known as the incarnation. God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, who has existed from eternity, took on flesh. Galatians 4:4-5 says, "When the time came to completion, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

Jesus did not cease to be God upon taking flesh. Also, Jesus wasn't less than human. Jesus was fully God and fully man. This was necessary because only a Redeemer who was fully God and fully human could bring sinful people back to God. He had to be fully human so that in human nature he could obey the whole law of God perfectly and suffer the punishment for human sin. He did both of these things on our behalf. He had to be fully divine so that His obedience and suffering would be perfect and effective to save His people. Further, His divine nature made Him able to bear the righteous wrath of God the Father and overcome death.

The Incarnation

Consider Augustine's reflection on the incarnation: "He who existed as the Son of God before all ages, without a beginning, deigned to become the Son of Man in these recent years. He did this although He who submitted to such great evils for our sake had done no evil, and although we, who were the recipients of so much good at His hands, had done nothing to merit these benefits. Begotten by the Father, He was not made by the Father; He was made Man in the Mother whom He Himself had made, so that He might exist here for a while, sprung from her who could never and nowhere have existed except through His power."¹

The incarnation is central to the gospel the message, and we should meditate upon its reality and let the power and joy of it wash over us.

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- Application: How does the reality of the incarnation change the way that you understand and treasure the gospel? How might you live in a way that truly shows that the good news of the incarnate Jesus is truly precious to you?

Conclusion

John's Koine Greek is known to be the most simple and straightforward of all the New Testament writers. The concepts that he put forth reflect his writing, they are simple. God is the Creator. God is Trinity. God became flesh. These truths are easily understood—even by children. Yet they are heavy, deep, and mysterious. There is great joy, peace, and hope produced in us when we expend the effort to wrap our arms around them and apply them to our hearts and minds.

- ?
- If God owns what He creates, what does it mean to belong to God? If people looked at your calendar, checkbook, or your browser history would they conclude that you belong to God? What needs to change?
- ?
- What are some ways that you can expand your theological understanding of the Trinity so that you will better understand and appreciate the work of the Triune God on your behalf?
- ?
- If you are a Christian, does your life mirror His humility and service to others? Who are those that you serve? Do you expect to be served or do you look for ways to serve others?

Prayer of Response

Pray with these great truths in mind today. Pray as a person under authority, in submission. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. Pray to the Triune God acknowledging the different roles of the three persons of the Trinity on your behalf. Finally, pray with great joy giving thanks for the incarnation of Christ. Worship God because the Son of God took on flesh in order to redeem His people from death and the wrath of God the Father.

Additional Resources

- *John 1-12 for You* by Josh Moody
- *The Deep Things of God* by Fred Sanders
- *The Incarnation of God* by John Clark and Marcus Peter Johnson

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Story of Separation

Main Passages

- John 1:10-13; Genesis 3:1-7

Session Outline

1. Lest You Die (Genesis 3:1-7)
2. Bent from Birth (John 1:10-13)
3. Under God's Wrath (John 1:10-13)

Memorize

*The heavens were made by the word of the Lord,
and all the stars, by the breath of his mouth.*

-Psalm 33:6

Daily Readings

- Monday - Genesis 1:1-5
- Tuesday - Genesis 1:6-19
- Wednesday - Genesis 1:20-25
- Thursday - Genesis 1:26-31
- Friday - Genesis 2:1-14
- Saturday - Genesis 2:15-25

Extended Commentary

John 1:10-13

1:10-11. Immediately after describing the announcement, John tells us about apathy toward the message of regeneration. The world (kosmos) is another of John's theme words; he used it seventy-seven times. With the device of repetition, John taught incarnation, creation, and rejection all in one verse (v. 10). Depravity and blindness thwarted God's efforts to reach out to his own creation—and still do.

In verse 11, the first appearance of the word *own* appears in the neuter gender and the second is masculine. What significance could such a distinction have for interpretation? One possibility is that Jesus came to earth, the place he had created, and the second tells us that the people who lived there turned him away. He was not welcomed or accepted.

1:12-13. Early in his book, John established the heart of the gospel, still two chapters away from the famous John 3:16. From the announcement of regeneration followed by apathy the apostle introduces the acceptance of regeneration.

Like most things in life, there is a right way and a wrong way to respond to God. The right way (and the only meaningful way) is to believe the gospel, receive the Savior and accept new birth as a result. The wrong way somehow links a relationship to God with human qualities such as physical birth, self-determination, or the choice of another person. In John's theological vocabulary, *believed* and *received* are synonymous when it comes to the gospel.²

Psalms 33:6-9

33:6-9. The psalmist declared, By the breath of his mouth, he made everything out of nothing, which is to say, he created *ex nihilo*. Omnipotently, he gathered the waters of the sea into jars like a farmer who puts his grain into storehouses. As a result, let all the earth fear the Lord, since he exercises such power over lives. For he spoke, and it came to be without any opposition or failure.

33:10-11. In the same way, God rules over human affairs. The Lord foils the plans of the nations that seek to operate contrary to his sovereign will. The plans of the Lord stand firm forever as opposed to the plans of impotent men who are always changing. The purposes of his heart endure unchanged, unlike the purposes of people. The God who spoke this world into existence continues to rule over it and to order all things by the secret counsel of his will (cp. Eph. 1:11).³

References

1. Keller, Timothy, and Sam Shammas. *New City Catechism*. New York, NY: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2012.
2. Gangel, Kenneth O., and Max Anders. *John*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000.
3. Lawson, Steven J., and Max Anders. *Psalms 1-75*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003.

Author Bio

Tim Keller (New City Catechism)

Timothy Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, which he started in 1989 with his wife, Kathy, and three young sons. Dr. Keller's books, including the New York Times bestselling *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*, have sold over 2 million copies and been translated into 25 languages.

Kenneth O. Gangel (John)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He's written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

Max Anders (John)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume *Holman Bible Commentary* series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Steven J. Lawson (Psalms 1-75)

Dr. Steven J. Lawson is founder and president of OnePassion Ministries, a ministry designed to bring about a new reformation in the church. He is a teaching fellow for Ligonier Ministries, director of the Doctor of Ministry program at The Master's Seminary, and a visiting professor in the Doctor of Ministry program at the Ligonier Academy of Biblical and Theological Studies. He has written two dozen books, including *The Passionate Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, *The Evangelistic Zeal of George Whitefield*, and *John Knox: Fearless Faith*.

Josh Moody (John 1-12 For You)

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Fred Sanders (The Deep Things of God)

Fred Sanders is professor of theology at Biola University's Torrey Honors Institute. A popular blogger and speaker, Sanders has written, edited, or contributed to several books, including *The Deep Things of God*. He blogs at www.scriptoriumdaily.com.

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Marcus Peter Johnson (PhD, University of Toronto) is assistant professor of theology at Moody Bible Institute. Along with writing his doctoral dissertation on union with Christ in the theology of John Calvin, he is also the author of several scholarly essays.