

FOUNDATIONS: *Let There Be Light*
GENESIS 1 (AFBC, 8/7/16)

We're in a significant moment in the history of this church. We're beginning a five-year journey toward the Bicentennial of Anderson First Baptist Church—200 years of being a Body of Christ—a beacon of light—in this community. For me, that feels pretty significant.

So how should we begin? Several weeks ago, as I was doing sermon planning, I began asking this question. Earlier I had felt a strong nudge in the direction of "Family Matters." As we moved toward our 195th Anniversary, I wanted to focus on and celebrate our most important human relationships in life—our family ties.

But now we begin a new year, a new chapter in the life of our church family, so...what now? Well, this time I felt just as impressed—and by the way, I don't believe these impressions just happen. They're God-inspired. And the impression this time directed me toward FOUNDATIONS—our Biblical Foundations.

All Scripture is inspired by God. At the same time, there are passages that we turn to over and over again because we know they are foundational to our faith—they are the underpinnings, if you will, of what we believe and how we live.

These foundational passages occur all through the Bible, Old Testament and New. Some are almost universally highly regarded by Christians—the Ten Commandments, for example, in the Old Testament, and the Sermon on the Mount in the New. It will come as no surprise that both of these are on the list.

Some passages, though, might be on your list, but not mine—or vice versa—so I would really like to hear from you on this. If there's a passage that you feel strongly must be included among these foundational texts, write it down and give it to me. I haven't come close to finishing the list—so...it may get included.

But here's how we're beginning. Three weeks from today, once school has started, we'll turn our attention to the Ten Commandments.

In the meantime, we'll take a very quick two-week trip through Genesis and Exodus to get us to that pivotal moment when the Lord gives to His people these ten foundational guidelines for living.

So today, we turn to Genesis—the book of beginnings. There is a wealth of material in the Old Testament that speaks God's Truth to our lives. Genesis is ancient history, and yet it's as relevant to us now as it was for those who first received it.

There seems to be an uneasiness about the world today. We hear all the time about political tensions and economic distress. Our environment seems to be acting up, but there's heated disagreement over the cause.

Confidence in our leaders—especially in those who seek to lead us--is at an all-time low. Changes are coming faster than we can process them--which only adds to our angst.

This is really nothing new, though. The troubles began shortly after time began. God created the heavens and the earth and all the inhabitants thereof; and God said, "It's good;" but things quickly went downhill.

To help us process all this, we turn this morning to Genesis chapter 1—the first chapter of the first book of the Bible. Listen again--in wonder and amazement—hear these beautiful and majestic verses: **Genesis 1: 1-5--**

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 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. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and He 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.

"In the beginning, GOD." It's interesting that the Bible spends no time at all trying to argue for the existence of God or persuade us that God is real. Instead, it insists, "**The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God...'**" (**Ps.14:1**) For the Biblical writers, God's reality was too obvious to seriously consider any alternative.

Of course, this was before anyone had heard of the “Big Bang” or any other theories of how this world came about. I’ve been to a few big bangs in the form of fireworks displays. They’re beautiful...exciting to see!

Before the first shell explodes, however, a lot of planning and coordination takes place, all directed by people who have experience with such things. Without a plan, there would only be noise and chaos, and people getting hurt!

Apply this to our world: even if there was some kind of cosmic explosion at the outset, are we to believe that it just happened--and in such a way as to eventually bring about everything that we see around us? Talk about a leap of faith!

I like this story: a group of scientists got together and decided that man had come so far in education and sophistication that God was no longer necessary. They chose one of their group to approach God and tell Him their conclusions.

“God,” the scientist said, “we’ve decided that we no longer need you. We’re to the point now that we can clone animals and do many other amazing things. Sorry, God, but that’s the way it is.”

God just listened patiently. Then God said, “Okay... but first, let’s have a little contest. Let’s see which of us can make a human being.” “Okay,” said the scientist, “You’re on.”

“Here are the rules,” God said. “We’ll do it just like I did back there at the beginning...when I made Adam.” “Sure, no problem,” the scientist said, as he reached down and grabbed some dirt.

“What are you doing?” God asked. “You used dirt, right—that’s what the Bible says.” “Yes,” God said, “I used MY dirt. YOU have to get your own!”

Science is a wonderful thing, friends—truly wonderful--but it’s limited. Science can answer many questions about this world--but not all of them. Science cannot address our “why” questions concerning life—for example, questions about ultimate meaning. For these, we need God.

And the reason is, “In the beginning, God...” It’s spelled out for us in the very first verse of the Bible: **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”**

Our most troubling times come when we forget this foundational truth. Life is dark and chaotic, it's in a state of disarray, when God is absent.

Genesis 1:1 tells us that God is and everything else is His creation. **Verses 2 and 3** assure us that when God finds chaos, He knows how to deal with it: **"...the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."**

That should remind us that God is always at the edge of our darkness and chaos, that no matter how troubled our lives seem to be, God is ready to shine His light into our circumstances and bring order--and make sense--out of our confusion.

In his poetic prayer, **John Greenleaf Whittier** wrote: **"Drop Thy still dews of quietness, Till all our strivings cease; Take from our souls the strain and stress, And let our ordered lives confess The beauty of Thy peace."**

Perhaps we hear this verse and think, "Oh, that it were true—that God could really relieve the strain and stress and bring order, peace, and calm to my life!" Well, friends, this is God's promise, if we'll allow Him to do His work in us, turning our strivings into peace.

Verse two uses the words "formless," and "empty," and "darkness." That's us, friends--without God. There's a void deep inside each one of us until we allow God to come into our hearts and fill it!

Interesting thing about the way God begins creation. It doesn't start out complete. It's not instantly beautiful. Really, it sounds messy--like that glob of wet clay a potter puts on his wheel. It's "formless"...until God slowly shapes it into something splendid.

In this regard, the Bible speaks of "creation," but also "new creation"—and it's all God's work. Paul tells us that 'anyone who is in Christ Jesus is a NEW creation—the old passes away and the new arrives--in us!'

It's the same God at work, whether He's molding that primordial mush into a world or reaching into the darkness of our lives and shaping them into something that has substance and meaning.

And, friends, like creation itself, this, too, is a process--a long one, lasting entire lifetimes—from the moment God gets hold of our lives, and then continuing right on through eternity!

Maybe you feel like you're still in the dark, though—that nothing has yet taken shape in your life. There's still a void, an emptiness--if not in your own life, then surely in the life of someone you know—the darkness and emptiness are still there.

Good news, friends. **Verses 3-4: "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good..."**

Light out of darkness—and it's not just here in Genesis 1. This runs all through the Bible—it's a "foundational theme."

It comes into focus in the New Testament with Jesus Christ, the "light of the world." But here it is in the third verse of Genesis 1—in the very beginning: out of darkness, light, new light, God's Light!

One of the great things about studying the Bible is how it keeps shedding new light every time we go to it. Here's something you may have missed before:

Light happens on day one: "Let there be light, and there was..." The light gets separated from the darkness and we have night and day. Again, that all happens on day one—but stay with me:

On day two, **"God said, 'Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.'" (Gen. 1:6)** So now we have earth and sky—on day two.

On day three, **"God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so." (Genesis 1:9)** The mush becomes land and sea, and the earth has plants and trees by the end of day three.

Now hear this—day four: **"God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to**

give light on the earth.’ And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.” (Genesis 1:14-16)

So on day four, we have the sun, moon, and stars! But here’s what I missed about all this for a long time—maybe you’ve missed it too: the light came on day one—before the sun, moon and stars appeared!

Not to take anything away from these celestial bodies and their importance in the universe, but it wasn’t sun, moon and star light that came first. On day one, it was just...Light—God’s Light—maybe that Light Divine that we see shining throughout the Scriptures, and always with the intention of getting inside of us!

So, when God delivers King David from a tough spot, he sings: **“You are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord turns my darkness into light.” (II Samuel 22:29)**

And the Psalmist says, **“The Lord is my light and salvation—whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1)** and **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)**

The prophet Isaiah announces, **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” (Isaiah 9:2)**

Isaiah then ties this good news to the birth of a baby: **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)**

A few centuries later, Jesus Christ is born; and when Mary and Joseph bring the baby to be circumcised, old Simeon takes Him into his arms and tells God he’s ready to die now--because **“...my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” (Matthew 2:30-32)**

Later, John tells us: **“In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” (John 1:4-5)**

And then, as I continued to follow the light through the New Testament, I came to **II Corinthians 4:6**; and for the first time, I saw this verse in a whole new light.

Listen: **"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light** (the same light we read about in Genesis 1) **shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."**

Paul understands. He gets the connection. Before his encounter with Christ, Paul had a deep darkness in his soul.

But then the Light of Christ got hold of Paul, and though he went through more troubles than most of us can imagine, the Light never left him—not even when he suffered through the very darkest of days.

The God of Light--and Love--who made something out of nothing when He created this world--performed a miracle of "new creation" in Paul's life.

Paul found Christ that day on the Damascus road, and the Light took hold of Paul's heart. He was never the same again—and that was good, too.

God wants to do the same in my life and yours--and does as we find Jesus Christ and place our faith in Him.

Friends, I don't want to go through this life, with all the challenges, frustrations, and dark places that we talked about earlier, without the LIGHT—without Jesus, the Light of the world, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ!"

This is foundational. It was God's plan from the very beginning—for His world, and for His children: "Let there be LIGHT"—in my life, in your life—it's GOOD!