

## The Starting Place

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Isaiah 40:18-21, 28-31; John 17:1-3

One of the most popular movies of all-time is *The Sound of Music*, a musical that takes place in 1938 during the Nazi takeover of Austria. It's about a young woman named Maria who becomes a governess to seven children of a widowed Austrian naval officer, and after bringing love and music into their lives, marries the officer, and then, together with the children, escapes the Nazis. The movie has many wonderful songs, such as "Climb Every Mountain," "Edelweiss," and "Do-Re-Mi," which is the song with which Maria teaches the children how to sing. Perhaps you may remember it, "Do-Re-Mi," and how it begins with the words, "Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start."

Starting at the very beginning is not merely a memorable musical lyric, it is an absolute necessity of life. It's simply a self-evident truth that everything begins at its starting place, and everything comes forth from where it began. So, if you don't start at the right place, you'll in all likelihood not know where you are going, or, worse, you will believe you are going in the right direction when you are actually going in the wrong direction. For example, if you look at a map or pull up a Google map on your device to give you instructions about where to drive to a destination, the first thing you need to determine is your starting place. If you get that wrong, your route will be wrong, and you'll probably not get to where you want to go. Or if you are adding up numbers in your checking account and don't start with the correct numbers, no matter how accurate you go on to calculate the numbers, it will be wrong and not add up, which is the perception that many people have about life - it doesn't add up. The starting place is the place to begin because everything else will be determined and defined by where you begin.

It is because of this reality that the very first words of Scripture begin at the starting place of everything that has had a beginning with the words, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" These are the words of the very first verse, of the very first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis. And it is with these words that our church begins a study this Fall of the Book of Genesis.

The book of Genesis receives its title, “Genesis,” from the Greek word “genaysis,” which means “to come into existence.” It’s similar to our English word “generate” which means “to cause something to come into existence or to happen.” The Book of Genesis is the book of beginnings, and, in specific ways, it is the most important book of the Bible. This is because the Book of Genesis is about origins, the book that reveals the starting place for everything that has had a beginning.

Three of the most important questions that anyone can ask about themselves and their life are “Who am I,” “Where did I come from,” and “Why am I here?” The answers you give to these questions will be determined by where you begin and where you start. For example, if you think, as so many people have come to believe from the time Charles Darwin wrote the book *The Origin of the Species* in 1859, that the present form of the universe has evolved without any reason or purpose by uncaused random events identified as “mutations,” then the answer to the questions, “Who am I,” “Where did I come from,” “Why am I here?” are that you are nothing but a blob of protoplasm that simply happened for no reason, that what you do with your life and how you live in relationship with people makes no ultimate difference, that you could be a Mother Teresa who devotes her life to save the lives of babies, orphans and homeless or an abortionist who gets paid to kill babies in the womb, it really doesn’t matter, because when you die, there is nothing – you are nothing, coming from nothing, and going to nothing. Where you start determines where you go and where you will end up. But if your starting place is what is revealed in the first words and first chapters of Genesis, then your understanding about who you are, why you are here, and where you may be going will be absolutely different. Origins - the starting place - will determine everything else.

The Book of Genesis is the book of origins, the starting place for everything that has had a beginning and come into existence. It is the revelation from God about the place where we are to begin with our knowledge and understanding of, and I say this with complete confidence, our knowledge and understanding of everything that exists. Nothing in the universe can be rightly known or understood without the right understanding of what God has revealed in the Book of Genesis, and especially the first chapters of Genesis, and even more precisely the very first words of the first verse of the Book of Genesis.

It has been my observation that most people who read the first verse of the Genesis move quickly beyond the very first words, “*In the beginning God,*” to the words “*created the heavens and the earth.*” And, of course, God creating the totality of the universe, both the physical and spiritual realms, is foundational to all true knowledge about the reality of life and everything that has come into existence. And while this is vital to understand, the words “*created in the heavens and the earth*” are not the most important words. Nor are they the actual starting place for us to know the truth about life, existence, and reality. For the starting place for everything in the universe is revealed in the first four words, “*In the beginning God.*” Everything about you, about the world you live in, everything that is declared throughout the earth in Christian worship services with the words, “As it was in the beginning, now is and ever shall be, world without end, Amen,” starts with, comes forth from, and is determined and defined by the reality of “*In the beginning God.*” God was in the beginning God is now, and God ever shall be. To Him be the glory, Amen.

The words, “*In the beginning God,*” do not mean that God had a beginning, as if there was absolutely nothing in existence, and then poof, somewhere and somehow something that we might be called “God” came into existence. While the imaginations of human minds can conjure up a belief that everything come into existence like a rabbit that is pulled out of a hat by a magician, where there is no rabbit, and where there is no hat, and where there is not even a magician, yet the magician pops into existence out of nothing, and then the hat, and then the rabbit, it isn’t possible in the real world. This is because what can come from nothing is nothing.

There has always been something that has always existed, and that something is not merely an abstract thing. He is a Personal Being - the Supreme Being, the Being Who has eternal, self-existing life and power in His own Being. That Being is God, the Living God, God Almighty, the Great I Am, Who has no beginning and no ending, Who was there in the beginning, the beginning of everything that had a beginning, for He is the One Who created it all out of nothing. “*In the beginning, God...*”

Who is this God? This is not merely a theoretical matter of personal preference as is expressed in the bumper sticker seen on cars with the symbols of different religions forming the word “coexist.” Such a completely apathetic opinion about God, as well as an absolute failure to

understand what the various religions believe, while being trendy in the godless, secularized culture that permeates the United States, is not one held in much of the rest of the world. For example, that bumper sticker won't do you much good today in Afghanistan where people are killing, raping and enslaving other people who don't believe in the same god as they do. Who God is, is literally a matter of life and death in that place.

But the Bible reveals it's not merely a matter of life and death in this world. For Who God truly is, and the God you actually believe in and worship is a matter of eternal life and death – eternal life in the fullness of love and light in relationship with God, or death, existing in eternal darkness and agony separated from God.

The eternal and absolute reality of this to every soul who will ever live is stated in the words of the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ the night before He died for our sins when He said, "*This is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent*" (John 17:3). In these words, Jesus summarizes the purpose of God in creation, the essence of what life is, and what life is ultimately all about - not merely existence, but life, eternal life, the essential nature and power of the life that never dies but lives in the fullness of life because you live in the fullness of the glorious presence of God. Jesus said life is to know – not merely know about or profess a superficial religious assent to - but know in actual living, personal relationship the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who, Who reveals and makes known the truth of Who God is because He is the only way to God.

God's purpose in creation was to make Himself known that we may know Him. And for us to know Him in living personal relationship is what life is all about because it is the essence of eternal life. Simply stated, if you have a living, personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, you have life, eternal life. But if you don't, you don't have true life, you are merely existing.

Who is this God, the God that the Bible says we must know, because the knowledge and fear of Him is beginning and starting place of knowledge, which means that unless you know and fear Him, you ultimately know nothing (Proverbs 1:7)? Who is this God, the God that Scripture says you must know because the knowledge and fear of Him is the beginning and starting place of wisdom, which means how you are to live your life in relationship to Him Who created you and everything else in the universe (Proverbs 9:10)? Who is this God, the God that Jesus

said to know is the essence of life, eternal life, the life that will live forever in eternal love, joy, and peace? The Book of Genesis is the place to start as it begins with the words, "*In the beginning God.*"

These words reveal real history, actual history. They are not myth or a psychological construct concocted to ease the fears of a despairing human heart existing in the vast, uncertain void of a universe in which we desperately hope we are not alone on this speck of a planet in the midst of the billions of lifeless galaxies of empty space. These words are truth - not merely true, they are the truth - the truth about the certainty and reality of the one true God Who has always existed, Who reigns and rules sovereignly over every single thing in the universe He created, Who brought it all into existence out of nothing and holds it all together by His almighty power, Who guides it in His providence according to His wisdom and purpose, and Who will bring it all to the destination He determined before He created it.

The words, "*In the beginning God,*" are the starting place for everything, for they tell us where to start with everything. They tell us that life is not about us, but about God. They tell us that God does not exist for us, but we exist for God. They tell us that when we start with God, the God of the Bible, and what is revealed in the unfolding account of history recorded in the Book of Genesis, we will know who we are, why we are here, where we are going, and how we are to live in His world. This is because we and everything else is determined and defined by our relationship with the one true God Who was there in the beginning, the God Who is the starting place of everything that has had a beginning.

The first words of the Bible start with God, for the Bible is not merely a record of the writings, wanderings, and wonderings of various persons and people over the course of history. It's about God - the Living God, the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. And it's about His works in the history of the universe He created. And the brief account of the days of creation recorded in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis reveals foundational truths about God and the real world we live in, truths that are revealed in greater fullness through the pages of history recorded in the Bible. They are foundational truths that the one true God is Trinity, that He is holy, being set apart from everything else, that He is a God of order, law, righteousness and judgment, that what He begins

He brings to completion, that He is a God of beauty, goodness and wonder Who has graciously and joyously made it all for all of us who are made in His image so that we can know Him, love Him, and worship Him for Who He truly is.

These are not abstract, theoretical ideas that have no practical application for your life. They are truths about the most important realities of who you are, where you came from, why you are here, and how you are to live. And perhaps the most important practical application of the starting place can be seen in a headline of a popular supermarket magazine that I recently saw which quoted a well-known celebrity actress's bold declaration, "My Life, My Rules." No, your life is a gift from God Almighty, the God Who brought you into existence out of nothing, and gives you life and breath. And because you are His creation and live in His world, you are to live by His rules, and to live for His glory.

The starting place for everything is that He is God and you are not, and that He created you and everything else for His glory. This is the starting place of reality, and of life, and of our lives: "*In the beginning, God...*"