I. Intro

A. The question is not whether you: believe in a story; have a philosophy of life; have a worldview; have working answers to the six big questions that shape everyone:

1. Who is God? (Who or what ultimately matters?)

2. Who am I?

3. Where did I come from?

4. What is expected of me?

5. What happens when I die?

6. And where do I go for answers to the first five question?

B. The question is not whether we have answers to these questions. We grow up in a culture that provides us with answers.to these questions. So, the question is, are our answers any good? Are they right? We all have a working theory about life. We all have a worldview. There is no view from nowhere. The question is, which story do we believe? There are a number of options.

1. The progressive, secular story is common today. It says that history is moving toward greater freedom and inclusion, and meaning in life comes from becoming your most authentic self.[1]

2. The Marxist / Critical Theory story says that history is a struggle over power and that the path to justice involves dismantling the systems that benefit some at the expense of others.[2]

3. The postmodern story says there is no universal story and claims otherwise are just attempts to grab power.

4. Existentialism says there's no given meaning or purpose to live, so we must create one for ourselves.

5. Nihilism says that doesn't really work. We must be grownup enough to accept that there is no meaning.

6. Of course there are others:

a) The Islamic story says that God is one, that Muhammad is his prophet and that we must all submit to him.

b) The Buddhist story says life is marked by suffering, which is rooted in our attachments, and that liberation comes by using the Eightfold Path to learn to give up those attachments and move towards enlightenment.

7. We could add more, chart them – put them into a few major categories. Talk about which are growing.

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8. We could talk about how confusing this moment is, because: 1) there are so many views in circulation; 2) many of them are internally incoherent; 3) and because many Americans make up their own - they piece together a worldview with bits and pieces from other worldviews – and change it often, especially when they face a crisis, because that is often when it's obvious that your worldview – your story – does not work.

C. There are a lot of directions we might go. What we're going to do is look at the story that unfolds in The Bible. Having established that everyone has a story, I want to unpack the Christian story, doing so because I believe that many who claim to be Christ-followers don't actually know The Story.

1. Many Christians know stories found in the Bible – David and Goliath, the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son. And they know some other things – e.g., a verse here and there, the Lord's Prayer, a few of the Ten Commandments - but they do not know The Story. They do not understand the big picture.

a) They do not understand how this collection of 66 books - 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. Written over 1,500 years by 40 different authors on three continents and in three different languages – they do not understand how it goes together to tell one big story. They have not seen the arc of redemption. The Story has not yet come into focus.

b) I know this to be true, because I was a Christian for a half dozen years before it came into focus for me. And I

2. And so the plan for this year - between now and the end of June - is to walk through The Book. Over 40 sermons on forty key passages, we intend to unfold The Story.

3. I'm looking forward to it for a bunch of reasons:

a) I mean, it's a great story – it's a life-giving and encouraging story.

b) It is an exciting story - full of unexpected left turns and "you've got to be kidding me" moments (like when God shows up to rescue us and does so not by using his power, but through the weakness of the cross).

c) It's a Good News story. The Bible is not fundamentally full of advice and inspiration. It's Good News. One of the reasons I am looking forward to this series is the opportunities it will provide to show you that it's all about Jesus and the Gospel is on display early and often.

d) I'm excited about unpacking the Story because in it God reveals himself. Theologians note that God reveals himself to us in two primary ways: Through Natural (sometimes called General) revelation. And through Supernatural (sometimes called Special) Revelation.

e) This refers to the things we can discern about the Creator based on creation, including the creation of our heart. The claim is there are things we cannot not know, because God has written them on our heart.

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f) The second is the way God has revealed himself to us through Jesus (the Word of God incarnate). The best way to understand God the Father is to look at God the Son. He is – according to Hebrews 1 – **the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.** Also in this category is The Bible – the Word of God Written.

D. So, in this series, we are going to be unpacking the Bible because many have not connected the dots. We are doing so because it's exciting, it is Good News, it reveals God. And there are many other reasons. I want to mention two:

1. First, we are unpacking and outlining the Bible because it's true. I have been persuaded that the Bible is The Story. This is what it claims. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we are told that this Book is "God-breathed" – which refers to God's expiration. His breath.

2. And we are doing so because it's not the easiest book to understand – some of its riches do not yield themselves to people who are very busy and very distracted.

a) I believe in the doctrine of perspicuity – that is, that Scripture's central message is sufficiently clear.

b) However, there is a lot that requires some effort. And in addition to a few of the challenges I already mentioned - it's not one book it's 66. And it's written over 1,500 years and in 3 languages. There are a few others:

(1) It's not laid out in chronological order.

(2) It's not written in one genre.

E. So, in this series the goal is to help you see how it works. To get the big picture. To see the redemptive arc. To that end, we're going to look at 40 of the most passages. Forty passages that introduce key themes or are instrumental in the unfolding plan.

II. And we're starting in the beginning. We start with the famous, iconic first line from Genesis 1:1: **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth**.

A. **In the beginning**. The claim is that there was a beginning – a starting point. This would have been a jarring claim in Moses's day.

1. Most modern cosmologies contend there was a beginning.[3] If the universe was eternal, we'd be in heat death by now. So, it had a start. Most ancient cosmologies assumed the universe was eternal.[4] I hold to the traditional view that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch or Torah). Which means Genesis was written in the second millennium BC – some say the 15th c BC others say the 13th. It depends on the dating of the Exodus. At that time, people did not believe in a beginning.

2. Let me call a time out here to note that this series will raise lots of questions that we do not have time to cover on Sunday AM. I will keep the Pod Cast on questions from the sermons going. So, send me your questions. Also, we have lots of resources for small groups.

3. Moving on.

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B. In the beginning **God.**

1. If there was a beginning, the obvious first question is, how. Nothing comes from nothing. People used to believe in uncaused causes – basing it on bread mold. Life just happened out of nothing. No longer. It's clear by looking at the universe that the universe is not eternal. How did it come about. Genesis says, God created it.

2. It doesn't say, "In the beginning, there was chaos." Or, "At the beginning, impersonal matter organized itself." It says: In the beginning, God.

3. The Hebrew term used is *Elohim*, which is the plural of El (although it uses a singular verb). It is not God's name – we do not get that until Exodus 3- which is sermon number four. El is a generic title.[5] (If you are old enough you might Amy Grant's song, El-Shaddi. Anyway, there are a few Hebrew titles for God. In addition to El-Shaddai (which means God Almighty) we El Elyon (which means God Most High).

4. So, we don't have a name yet. But we have a big claim. Before anything else existed, there was a God.[6] Naturalists believe that nature is all there is. Supernaturalists believe something exists beyond and prior to nature. Before the cosmos, before time, before matter — there was *God*

C. In the beginning, God **created**

1. The Hebrew word is *bara*, a word Scripture reserves for God's creative activity alone. Genesis 1:1 - read with the rest of Scripture - leads Christians to confess creatio ex nihilo. That is, God created out of nothing.

a) Speaking things into existence is his signature move. Virtually every other creation account in the ancient Near East had the gods working with pre-existing material.[7] Here it is out of nothing, suggesting unthinkable amounts of power.

b) We call ourselves creative, but all human creativity involves rearranging something already here: words, sounds, colors, chemicals, wood, stone, or ideas. God alone creates without borrowing.

c) There is an old joke about scientists who tell God they have finally learned to create life out of nothing. God says, "Show me." One scientist bends down and begins gathering some dirt. God interrupts him: "Not so fast. Get your own dirt."

D. In the beginning God created **the heavens and the earth.**

1. This phrase is what scholars call a merism. It refers to two opposites paired together to express everything. The "heavens and earth" means everything. Every particle, every galaxy, every dimension of reality.

2. This was pretty revolutionary when Moses wrote it. At the time, people were claiming that the sun was a god. And the sea was a god. Genesis 1:1 dismantles all of this. It de-deifies everything. The text doesn't even name the sun and moon — it calls them "the greater light" and "the lesser light" – because their proper names were also the names of deities, and it will not give them the dignity.

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3. By the way, the claim that God created the heavens and the earth – everything – out of nothing, should get our attention and shape our worldview.

a) For starters, it should take away everything else we might be tempted to worship – because they are all under God (less than God).

b) Secondly, it should bring encouragement. If God can bring entire galaxies into existence out of nothing, He can fix my problems.

c) Third, it implies God's ownership of everything – including us. After all, creators are owners.

d) And there's more. The idea that God created the world set in place the conceptual preconditions for science.

(1) You can't study the world if you think it's a god. Or if you think it's controlled by 50,000 gods, some of whom might be moody and erratic.

(2) The scientific revolution happened in the Christian West both because: 1) of the conviction that the world is real, but not divine; and 2) because of the belief that you can learn about the creator by studying the creation.

E. **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** Then, in verses 2-25 we get more details from the creation account – the creation of light and animals and vegetation, all of which is described as being good. Then, picking up in verse 26 we read:

1. Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image. This is perhaps the most consequential claim in Western history. It means every person, regardless of race, age, ability and productivity, bears the image of God, has value and is worthy of human rights and care. It means we need to care for the poor and the marginalized. It means our lives have purpose and meaning. It pushes back on nihilism. We do not have a universe that began with impersonal forces and chance. You are not a cosmic accident. The temporary pinnacle of the evolutionary process. We are not the exhaust of the random collision of space, time and chance. You were made by God in his image. This changes everything.

2. Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

3. So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

4. V28: **God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."**

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a) This is one of the big three commissionings we find in the Bible. Later we will the Great Commandment – call on us to love God and others. And we will also have the Great Commission. Here we have God telling people step up – expand in number and to build, govern, create, name, order, and cause the world to flourish under God. It's an endorsement of work. It shows the honor and dignity of work.

5. Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

6. V31: **God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.**

a) The first five days what he saw was good. Here it is very good. Please note, good is good. The material world is not evil, not something to escape, not spiritually irrelevant. This is:

(1) A direct challenge to the Gnostic impulse — ancient and persistent — that treats matter as the problem, the body as a prison, the physical world as beneath serious spiritual concern.

(2) And this has implications for how we think about work, beauty, food, bodies, and ultimately the resurrection. The goal of the Christian story is not to escape the physical world — it is to see it redeemed.

7. **And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.**

III. OK, a few more brief notes here.

A. I want to be sure you know that Genesis 1-11 is uniquely important. It sets up all that follows, which is why theologians spend lots of time here – especially in Genesis 1-3.

1. When I was in seminary, I took an Old Testament Survey class because I did abysmally on the Bible entrance exam. It was a ten-week survey class, and we didn't make it out of Genesis 1-12 until like the 6th week.

2. There is a branch of theology called systematics – it develops doctrines, such as the doctrine of God or of mankind, or of work or of worship. It collects what we get throughout the Bible. And, it always starts back in Genesis 1-3.

3. Genesis 1-11 is "universal history" that sets up the story, that begins in Genesis 12. This is where the curtain rises. But within Genesis 1-11 you have Genesis 1-3 (which is really, really, really important). And then you have Gensis 4-11, which is very important, mostly to make sure you understood the implications of Genesis 1-3.

B. It is appropriate here to note that the Genesis 1 language will show up again.

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1. We will get it at the start of the New Testament. Genesis 1:1 is "In the beginning God created." John opens his Gospel, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** Among other things, this is a claim that the Creator and the Redeemer are the same Person.

2. We also get the Genesis 1 language at the very end of the Book. At the end of Revelation we have, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth." The Story moves from good creation through catastrophic fall through redemption back toward a Good recreated creation.

C. It's worth noting that in Genesis 2 the creation account is retold from a different angle.

D. And it's important to note that next week - in Genesis 3, everything breaks.

IV. But, I need to land the plane. I need to pivot from lecture to sermon. I want to be sure you see that The Story – Your Story I hope – is one that includes:

A. A personal God. God will reveal more and more of himself. But, notice already, He isn't a force or an accident. He's a Person who speaks, who creates, who calls what he makes good, and who make us – made you! - in His image.

1. I don't know how this morning finds you. Some of you arrived feeling as though your life has little meaning. Not true. You were made by God and for God. And that changes everything.

B. And oh by the way, your value is going to be on display, because this God – so far only Elohim – not only created the world and you, we are going to see him write himself into the story to rescue you.

C. So far we only have that we are highly valued – made in his image. Next week we get deeply fallen. And then, we will see how greatly loved we are. You are.

D. Your understand of yourself needs to be shaped by The Story. You are not free to make one up. We do not create an identity we inherit one. And to know what it is, we need to know our story.

E. This week, Genesis 1:1 – in the beginning God. Next week, Genesis 3 – the Crash.

V. Let's pray:

A. Lord God, author of The Story. Thank you for your Word Written – so that we can better understand ourselves. And Lord Jesus – the Word of God Incarnate. Thank you for entering our story.

B. Forgive us for asking you to play a supporting role in a story we are trying to write. Help us lay down the pen and trust and follow you.

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1 The progressive story holds that human dignity is sacred, that freedom matters, and that suffering is real and should be reduced. In this story our job is to oppose any ignorance or tradition that stands in your way. From a Christian vantage point, this story is right in claiming that our identity matters, that there is something

in us worth knowing, and that being forced to live inauthentically is a form of suffering. But it places infinite weight on the self, which it cannot bear. We cannot be our own ultimate reference point. This is why the culture that has most aggressively pursued self-actualization is also the most anxious. It has no account of where that dignity comes from, no stable definition of the "authentic self" it calls you to express, and no resources for why human rights are binding on anyone. It borrows its moral capital from the very tradition it has abandoned.

2 I believe the Marxist story is right that power corrupts, that the powerful often exploit the weak, and that systems can encode injustice in ways that are invisible to those they benefit. The prophets of Israel said the same thing. But this narrative locates the problem entirely outside the individual — in systems, structures, and oppressor classes — which means it has no account of why the liberators so reliably become the next oppressors. It cannot explain human evil because it exempts the self from the diagnosis.

3 Stephen Hawking - no friend of faith - admitted that "the universe has not existed forever. Rather, the universe — and time itself — had a beginning."

4 I do not wish to claim that modern cosmology has proven Gen. 1. Perhaps all I should do is note that modern cosmology has made belief in an eternal, static universe much harder to sustain.

[5] The Hebrew word *Elohim* is a common biblical title for God. Although its form is plural, it is paired here with a singular verb: the Bible is speaking of the one God.

[6] In some disciplines – like math – you learn simple basic ideas before you move on to things that are more complicated. You learn 2 + 2 = 4 before advancing to multiplication, geometry or calculus. Theology starts with some huge, game changing, pivotal claims.

[7] In the Babylonian account, Marduk creates the world by splitting Tiamet, the chaos-monster, in half.

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