



# From Genesis to Revelation

TEXT  
*John 1:1-5*

January 7, 2018 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

Last year I told the story of the entire Bible in one sermon. If you weren't here, you should know it took three days. Several of you came out after that and said, "You should do that sermon every year." Well, there is no sermon that needs to be preached every year. But I am going to tell the Bible story again today. I have repeated some stories, but I doubt you have noticed that.

It's more of a class than a sermon today, but I hope it is helpful. This will be fast, and I will probably leave out a few parts in an effort to keep it to three days.

It begins with the Spirit hovering over chaos. Into the emptiness, God speaks: "Let there be ... light and life," and there was. This is not a science story that tells the "how" of creation. This is a love story that tells us why the world was created, and it says this: *What makes life possible is the word of God.* Apart from that word, there is only chaos — there is no life.

God created Adam. *Adam* in Hebrew means "humankind." So like all the stories in this book, this is a story about us. Adam is created by God, cared

for by God, instructed by God. *You can eat it all, but don't eat that. It's not good for you.*

But Adam and Eve, they think they know better. God tells them how to live in this world, but they know better than God. We all think we know better. That's what sin is. It's not so often that we fail to know God's intention for us; it's that we think we know better.

Sin against God always results in sin against brothers and sisters. So only four chapters in, Cain kills his brother Abel. This is our story too, as we will not always treat each other well in God's world.

God looks down on his creation, and it makes him regretful. God tries to wash away the bad with a flood. The flood doesn't change humanity, but it does change God. *Never again*, God says.

This might be the point where God chooses to give up — to wash God's hands of the world — but we will learn God can't do that. God will not give up.

God picks a man named Abraham, and begins the relationship with the Hebrew people. God calls Abraham and says, *You are blessed to be a blessing. You will be my instrument of blessing the world.* The

struggle for people of faith — then and now — has always been to remember that our relationship with God is never for our benefit alone. You are blessed to be a blessing.

The call of Abraham was to *leave your father's house and go to the land that I will show you.* In other words, *leave life as you have known it, leave what you have assumed was good and right for you, and go live as I define life.* All Abraham had was a word, a promise. He went.

God's promise to Abraham would include descendants, but they would not come easily. There was Ishmael, and after time and painful testing, there was Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and then Joseph and his brothers who became 12 tribes of Israel. The stories of these families are messy. If you know their story, it will make you feel better about your own family, no matter how dysfunctional it may be.

The descendants of Abraham would find themselves in Egypt, slaves of the ancient Pharaoh. Oppressed, they cry out to God. God hears their cry and raises up Moses, who leads them across the sea. The Exodus is a defining moment in Israel's history — one that showed God to be a liberating God; a God who

hears the cries of the oppressed; a God who cares for people from the bottom up.

Again, like Abraham's journey — which was clearer about what was left behind and less clear about where they were going — Moses wanders in the wilderness for a generation. It was there in the wilderness on Mount Sinai that God would give the Ten Commandments. This was a gift. The commandments not only provide instruction on how to live life — like in the garden, *Eat this but don't eat that. It's not good for you.* The commandments say, *Live this way, not that way. That way is not good for you.* That's a gift!

But more than that, they show us how to respond to God in gratitude once God has touched us with grace.

Joshua would lead them into the land that God had promised. There they would be ruled by judges. Deborah, Gideon and Samson were among the judges.

But Israel saw other nations had kings, and they wanted to be like other nations. That's always a struggle for people of faith: How are we like others, and how are we different from others? What sets us apart? God was their king, but they wanted a human king, so Saul was anointed king. Then David followed and was forever seen as the king to be remembered and the king to be hoped for. Israel would always yearn for a "son of David" to rule over them in justice and righteousness. That king they called the Messiah. After King David, Solomon followed. He built the temple.

The temple would be the center of the universe; the throne of God was in the temple. They worshiped God with offerings, and they sang psalms.

After Solomon's reign, Israel divided into two kingdoms: north and south. There was a series of kings in the northern kingdom and another series of kings in the southern kingdom. Some kings were faithful, but not many. The problem with kings is that with all that power, it was hard to remember God's word.

So God sent prophets. Elijah and Elisha came. Nathan was the prophet to King David. Later would come what we call the literary prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Amos and Hosea and others. They were men of words and men of God's word. They were poets more than anything else. Sometimes prophets are misunderstood as those who could predict the future, but the gift of the prophets is that they could see the present. They could see what was really going on right now, and they named it.

Usually, the prophets had two concerns. They reminded God's people not to be casual about worship. They often said, *You have assumed that God has blessed you for yourself alone. That's too small. You are blessed to be a blessing.*

And the prophets were adamant that God was concerned for the poor. God is not casual about poverty. God cares for God's children from the bottom up. Poverty reveals that the community is broken.

Israel would ignore the prophets, and Israel would

crumble. First the northern kingdom would fall to the Assyrians. And the ten tribes of the north would be scattered across the Assyrian empire. Then 150 years later, the southern kingdom would fall to the Babylonians. Jews would be marched into exile, where they would be captive for a generation.

Exile raised questions. Had God finally given up on the world? Was this the time that God would say: "I've had enough. I wash my hands of you"? But they learned that God would not give up.

God never judges to settle scores; judgment always gives birth to redemption. Judgment isn't followed by grace; judgment is grace. Judgment is God's declaration: *That is not good for you. Stop!*

So from the prophets we hear again of God's dreams for God's creation. The prophetic dreams were not small: the lion lying down with the lamb; swords beaten into plowshares; the law of God being written on the heart so that all of God's children would live like God's children. They never let go of those dreams.

After a generation in exile, the Babylonian captives returned home. And then things seemed quiet. Almost 400 years passed without a prophet from God — until a baptizing preacher named John strode through the wilderness, proclaiming that the kingdom of God, the promised day of God, was near.

Like the spirit that moved over the deep and whispered creation, the spirit moves again

over a Galilean teenage girl named Mary and brings new creation.

One of the favorite ways the church would describe Jesus is they said he was “the Word.” The word we had known from the beginning was now in skin — the Word become flesh. Jesus would talk of the kingdom of God and tell stories of seeds and weeds and surprisingly good Samaritans. Some found him offensive, even dangerous, but others found him magnetic.

Like Abraham, who was asked to leave life as he had known it and go to a land that God would show them, Jesus too called followers to leave their boats and nets, to leave life as they had known it and follow him to a new kingdom. He taught them to pray and to care for one another; to see the world as he sees the world; and to live with one another as God intends human relationships to be.

They did their best. But God’s kingdom is not like our ways, and so it wouldn’t matter when or where Jesus showed up. Any nation, any people, any generation would want to kill him.

It did not surprise Jesus. The Romans and the religious leaders crucified him. They didn’t invent the cross for Jesus; it was their way with power. But Jesus faced their love of power with the power of love; he redeemed even the most evil aspects of this world. His death was not a tragedy, but the moment that revealed that God would stop at nothing to redeem the creation God so loved.

The world rejected this holy love and crucified him, and we may think that God would at last say, “I’ve had enough. If this is what you want, you got it. I’m finished with you.” But no, Jesus came back. “He is risen,” they said. God still will not give up.

And the risen one began to show up in his followers. They formed communities that reflected his life and teaching. Women were respected. Slaves were welcomed. The poor were not the recipients of mission, but became members of the family.

Much of the New Testament consists of letters — letters written by various leaders to these early, small congregations. These letters dealt with ordinary issues of how one lives as a Christian in the market, or in worship, or at work, or with family. And they dealt with the most significant issues, like “How do we face suffering?” Not all the issues are the same, but the struggle to live in a way that demonstrates our trust in Christ, well, that continues.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus did not bring to completion the dreams of the old prophets, but he did show us what they look like. So, the followers of Jesus continue to live toward that promised day.

The Bible ends with a promise. We call it Revelation. It is a word of hope for people in their worst moments — moments that might cause us to wonder if God has finally chosen to let go of us. Revelation declares that this world is no accident, and you are never insignificant. The fullness of God’s love will

be known by one and all, so do not be afraid, but live toward God’s promised day.

This is the story of the Bible. It is a story of a God who will stop at nothing to redeem the creation God loves.

It is a story of ordinary people: Abraham and Sarah, Ruth and Samuel, Amos and Martha, Joseph of Arimathea and James. The names continue through history and now include your names. This story lives in people. And in truth — like creation spoken into being with a word; like Israel, created with a word to Abraham; like Jesus, the Word becomes flesh — we have a word, a promise, a promised day toward which we live. We have nothing more than a promise: The kingdom is coming.

Like those who have gone before, this word will live in you too — imperfectly, no doubt, but it will live in you. And we will journey together until that final promised day, when the word is fulfilled, when the promises of the old prophets are realized, when all that has gone wrong is made right.

If I understand the text, this is the promise of the Bible, and it is a promise made to you.

**This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.**

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.