

“God Speaks”

A teenager recently asked me what I thought about a tattoo he was thinking about getting. He said he wanted a bible verse that would show others what he really believed and wanted my opinion on the verse he had chosen. Of course, the first thing I reminded him of was that tattoos are permanent—there is no going back—so it might be best to wait a few years before making such a lasting decision. I also reminded him that if he did decide to eventually go through with it, he better be prepared to answer why he chose that particular verse, because people would most likely be asking him about it for the rest of his life. It was at that point the excited look on his face about the possibility of a permanent reminder of God’s Word on his arm for all to see slowly turned to a look of concern. You see the verse he told me he wanted tattooed on his arm was Genesis 1:1. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

The young man said this is what he believed, but I could tell my reminder that he might be explaining this statement for years to come made him a little uneasy. Maybe he had already experienced some pushback at school for claiming divine creation as truth. I mean we all know that there are many among us, including some Christians, that consider the claim that God spoke the entire universe into existence as absurd, insulting, and anti-intellectual. Popular scientific world-views, including the theory of evolution, are certainly more appealing, because at least they attempt to explain how everything came into existence. And it’s not just scientific theories the young man will have to stand up to should he get that tattoo, but he will also be challenged by those who will say that if God created the world, he sure didn't know what he was doing because things like natural disasters, disease, and war sure make life on this earth miserable for so many people.

Will that young man ever get a Genesis 1:1 tattoo? I have no idea. But my brief conversation with him about it reminded me that the fist first verse of the Bible is probably the most complex verse in all of Scripture. Out of nothing, God spoke and the heavens and earth appeared. We’re talking the creation of matter, space, and time here. It’s amazing when you think about it, because we certainly can’t create out of nothing.

We can make things out of other things, but according to the Bible, creating is an action of God and God alone. Only he has the power and the freedom to speak things into existence. And that's just what he did. He spoke and things that weren't there before appeared.

Creation and creation themes in the Bible will be our topic over the next few weeks and we hear about it first in Genesis 1:1. But talking about creation, even from a Christian perspective, is actually pretty challenging. You might not think so, because it seems so obvious. God created the heavens and the earth, we get that. It was good; we messed it up. God the Son bore all those sins that messed it up. Now through our faith in him, God declares us forgiven and free, and we are to take care of his creation until the day Jesus comes back to make things new again. We get it. Or do we? You see what I just **spoke of was creation** from the standpoint of those who are in Christ Jesus. And it's right because it's biblical! But what about those who are outside the faith? What about the huge number of people who follow another religion or no religion at all? In the beginning, did God create the heavens and the earth for them? Of course he did! So you see what I mean about talking about creation only from a Christian viewpoint. It misses a lot of people who are obviously benefiting from our God who spoke everything into existence.

So let's think about this. God knows what's going on his creation. He sees the good, the bad, and the ugly, and yet he keeps it going and provides for all his creatures because everything still belongs to him. And sometimes it's really hard to live in that world because it means that those who are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ get the same sun and the same rain that the atheist's get. And it gets more personal than that because it also means that your neighbor who takes great pride in the immoral life he lives just might end up with a better job and a better house and better car than you do. It's a world where families who want children can't have them and a world where guilty killers go free. It's really hard to live in that world, because it seems that everybody is doing whatever they want and still getting along just fine.

But looking at God sustaining his creation only through our eyes and trying to figure it out with our flawed selves is not the way to approach God speaking the heavens and earth into existence. You see hidden behind God creating and sustaining his creation for all people is the mystery of his grace. Think about this— the God who speaks things into existence can certainly speak them out of existence. But he doesn't. He doesn't because he has done something for all people that no one could ever imagine. He comes into what he spoke into existence in the form of a man and takes upon himself

the wrath that all of us deserve— Christians, non-Christians, and everyone in between —for messing it all up. And through that broken body, who spoke the words “It’s is finished” before giving up his Spirit, God the Father brings life once again to the world. God creates. God sustains. God forgives. That’s what he wants every single person to know.

So I guess it’s really not that hard to talk about God the creator of heaven and earth from a Christian perspective. We might think we have it all figured out but we don’t. We can only rely on his promises, remembering that we can’t create anything— only God can do that. Out of nothing he speaks and the heavens and the earth are created. At his table he speaks the words “take and eat, take and drink” and creates forgiven sinners. At the font, he speaks the words “I baptize you in my name” and creates another member of his family.

So maybe the young teenager wasn’t that far off with his choice of tattoos after all. Don’t get me wrong, I’m certainly not suggesting you go out and get a Genesis 1:1 tattoo. But that verse can lead to some great conversations. And the good news is that no matter where a person is in life, God takes all people, including those who are confused or trying to control the world on their own terms, and gives to them a world that is already in control. And it’s a world guided and governed by his promises. **Amen.**