



Theme: Thoughtful Faith for Challenging Times

“Can Religion and Science Live Together?”

Sermon by Jeff Huber, January 8-9, 2022, at Summit Church, Durango

Genesis 1:1-3, Romans 1:20a

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

³ Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature.

VIDEO Sermon Starter

SLIDE Can Religion and Science Live Together?

This weekend we did a memorial service for one of our long-time members, Dave Trautmann, who was an avid fan of the University of Colorado Buffaloes, my alma mater. We even were asked by the family to wear our sweatshirts and it had me remembering a vivid story from my first year at college when I was taking an evolutionary biology class.

I was learning all about Darwin's theory of natural selection and while taking that class I was invited to a Bible study by someone on my dorm floor. I was attending the Methodist campus ministry called the Wesley Foundation on and off but not doing anything in terms of Bible study and this group, which I won't name, invited me so I joined them. I had been given this really nice NIV Study Bible by my mother for my birthday so I figured I should use it. The group was going to begin reading the Bible from the beginning and read it all the way through during the semester, which I had never done so I thought it was pretty exciting.

We started in Genesis, and it was there the problems began. As we begin reading the creation stories, I told them about what I was learning in my evolutionary biology class, and they all gave me a very cold stare. They wondered why I would take a class such as that and they warned me that I was going to have to choose between learning about creation from my class and what the Bible teaches about creation. They even went so far as to call my professor evil because he was trying to get me to stray from the path of the biblical truth of creation. I only attended that Bible study a few more times because I couldn't wrap my mind around how much I was paying for school and having to make that fit into what I was being taught as I read the book of Genesis all the way through for the very first time. I set aside my Bible and didn't pick it up again for a while, I must admit. I'm sure some of you are shocked to hear that admission from your pastor!

It wasn't until I began attending more regularly the Wesley Foundation and my pastors there began to talk to me about another way to read the Scriptures considering what I was learning in school that I began to read the Scriptures more diligently and they came to life in a powerful way. What I came to realize then and that I continue to see today is that there are things about our faith in the Bible that can trip us up unless we develop a framework to think about them and to work through our questions. I was a kid who always had questions and

sometimes people would turn to me and say, “Please, stop asking questions? Just accept and believe what we tell you!”

Let’s be honest, we have all said that to our kids at some point when they get in this incessant mode of asking question after question. But I was a kid who needed answers, even though I know there are some things for which I will never find a satisfying answer. Throughout my life it seems I have found more questions than answers, which is why we began last week in this sermon series encouraging you to ask tough questions because that is what helps us develop our faith. I tell you most every week that your faith needs to be yours and you can’t have mine and you will need to ask questions and wrestle with faith on your own. I think one of the greatest problems in North American Christianity is that we have encouraged people in our churches to simply accept the faith of their pastor instead of wrestling with their questions and wrestling with God. This is what the great characters of the Bible did and what we must do, and it’s why we are doing this series of sermons on thoughtful Faith for challenging times, and which we are looking at some of the questions I get most often as a pastor.

My hope is that this is the church for thinking people who want a place to wrestle with their questions and doubt. I like to think we are place for people who have walked away from church for faith because they have not been able to wrestle with these questions openly or they have been given answers that were not satisfactory. This may not be you, but most of us have friends or family members who struggle with these questions, and I hope these sermons will be helpful to you and you might invite others to join you as you hear them. My deep hope is that they help each of us claim of faith in Jesus which is meaningful and can carry us through the most difficult of circumstances, which we all will face at some point or another.

Today we begin with this idea of science and religion and if they can live together. Much of the conflict that happens for people around science or religion begins with the opening book of Scripture, in Genesis

chapters 1 to 3. We find in those opening chapters 2 creation stories that are distinct stories from different traditions in Israel's history. The first we find in Genesis 1 through chapter 2:4, is written as Hebrew poetry. It is a beautiful creed and litany which often was sung and put to music in early Hebrew culture. It describes God speaking everything into existence and beautiful language that is meant to move our hearts.

When we get to Genesis 2:4 and following we find Hebrew prose, or a narrative that tells a story about the first two human beings and their family. We learn about why they needed each other and why they were a gift and finally how they succumb to temptation and what happens to their family tree because of it, as paradise is lost.

When we read the beginning of Genesis as a science book or as history, like one pastor declared, "an eyewitness account from the only eyewitness in human history," we begin to have some problems with science and religion. I want to suggest you that we not only have problems with science and religion, but we run the risk of missing the point because we are caught up in circular arguments. I want to be clear that if you choose to read Genesis as a science or history book, that is fine but then there questions that must be wrestled with and it often pushes people away from faith because our answers don't work for various reasons.

Let me begin by being clear that I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God in these first few chapters are critical for us to understand deep truths as people of faith. But, if we read this first chapter literally then it says the earth and the plants and the animals were all made before the sun. That's an interesting idea, to have plants growing on the earth when there is no sun. It creates interesting questions to think we have an earth with no sun when we think about the solar system and how it works. This order seems impossible if we are scientific at all in our approach to creation.

If we move past these two creation stories, we get to the biblical

genealogies which create another struggle for us. Sir Isaac Newton and Johannes Keppler and the presiding Archbishop of Ireland James Ussher found that if you were to look at those genealogies and generations in the book of Genesis literally then the earth was formed in around 4004 BC. Ussher even went as far as to say that it was started on October 22 in the evening. I did some research and I'm still not clear how he pinpointed that particular day and time, but it was all the rage in the late 16th century to figure this out, but we would see that in conflict with just about every scientific discipline in the 21st century.

The Bible also was the source of people believing that the earth was flat with foundations that ran underground to a layer of water, which made sense given that people would dig wells for their water supply. There was then the atmosphere in the sky above was considered a dome, which made sense because it looks round when you look up and across the horizon. Somewhere in that dome were the starry hosts like the sun and the moon and the stars. Of course, it was believed the earth was stationary and everything moved around the earth because we are on the earth, and we are the center of the universe.

Today, most of us understand the earth is round and rotates around the sun, unless we are a particular basketball player for the Brooklyn Nets. You can look that up later. Most of us believe we are a part of one solar system within the Milky Way galaxy with hundreds of billions of other stars like ours. Most of us also believe that our galaxy is one of hundreds of millions like our own, as we look through the Hubble deep space telescope like this one.

GRAPHIC Hubble Galactic Menagerie

GRAPHIC Hubble Galaxy 100 million Light Years Away

GRAPHIC Rose Made of Galaxies

I love these images and this idea that our universe is awesome and vast and millions of light-years across. Our best scientific

understanding today is that our universe had its beginning with the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago, and that our planet Earth was formed about 4.5 billion years ago. Life began to develop about 1 billion years after that and all life was not created simultaneously but instead emerged slowly with simple forms of life first and then more complex life forms coming into being. The latest research in anthropology and archaeology tells us that Homo sapiens, modern humans, came into existence about 300,000 years ago.

If we look at the first three chapters of Genesis as giving us the scientific and historical record, then we are going to have some problems as we look at what scientists in today's world have discovered. I have read several resources put forth by groups known as "Young Earth Societies," and what is interesting is that if we maintain the earth is only about 6000 years old then the challenge is to fit all the scientific evidence into that timeline. They come up with some very interesting ideas, but they still conflict with what the scientific method tells us about our earth, solar system, galaxy, and universe. The main question I find myself asking is what God had in mind when God gave us the book of Genesis.

SLIDE What was God's intention with the book of Genesis?

Is Genesis meant to be a science book? Is it meant to be an eyewitness account of the creation of all things? What if Genesis is written and given to us as a statement of faith? What if Genesis is a faith book written by people who were expressing how they experienced God as they looked at creation all around them? What if Genesis is about people expressing not how creation came into existence but simply expressing Who is responsible for creation and what that tells us about the Creator and ourselves?

What if those who wrote Genesis took the scientific knowledge of their day and used it to help them understand how the earth was created? That was true up until the 1600s in terms of how people

understood the world came into existence and what science told us about the earth and the moon and the stars and the sun. What if they were taking the basic data they had and making a clear faith statement that behind everything that exists is God?

SLIDE In the beginning, God...

These words are meant to describe beauty and be a poetic litany with each refrain reminding us that what God created was good and that each movement marks a day. God speaks and then creation happens, and God sees that it is good, and there is evening, and then morning, and then night again. There is a rhythm to creation and to the world which we have noticed for as long as humans have been paying attention.

What if these words in Genesis are simply and clearly making a fundamental truth claim? It is something which is truer and deeper than anything we find anywhere else in the world, that everything derives its existence, and is created by, God. That is the truth of Genesis, chapter 1. God looked at all of it and said it was good, until it came to humans in which we read this.

BIBLE

³¹ Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

God looks over all of creation and then looks directly at you and me and says:

SLIDE “I created you, and you are very good!”

I don't believe God intended the beginning of Genesis to be a science lesson or a record of history, but a message of Truth to each one of us, that is fleshed out even more deeply in the second creation story about two people called Adam and Eve, which clearly seem to be symbolic names because they are found in many creation stories in the ancient near East, representing male and female.

Here's the next question I find myself asking. What is the intention of the creation story we find in Genesis 2 wasn't to give us a history lesson about the first two people? What if Genesis 2 and 3 is about teaching us about ourselves? In Genesis 1 we learn about God but in Genesis 2 and 3 we learn that as human beings we need companionship and help. What if this creation story is about reminding us that we are not meant to do life on our own but that we need God and we need each other? What's interesting is that science teaches us both of these truths, that humans need other humans, and we need a faith framework which tells us who we are and why we exist.

SLIDE We need God, and we need each other.

SLIDE We all struggle with temptation.

What if these two chapters of Genesis are about this truth that we all struggle with temptation, just like Adam and Eve? What if this story is warning us about the fact that we all will do things we wish we hadn't done and say things we wish we hadn't said? What if this story is about how going down that road which we think leads to life actually leads to destruction and then paradise is lost? I think those might be the important messages of Genesis chapters 1 through 3 that we can easily miss if we are consumed about making the science and the history work with how we understand the world today. I think there is a deep truth in these words even though I don't think it's teaching us about science or literal history.

Understood this way, there is no conflict between science and religion or science in the Scriptures. What you may not know is that it was on Christmas Eve, 1968, when more humans on the planet heard the story of creation in Genesis 1:1-10 at one time than any other moment in the history of the world. More people were glued to their television sets on that Christmas Eve around the world to see something remarkable which was happening for the first time ever.

Apollo 8 was circling around the moon and even though it didn't

land it gave world its first glimpse of the earth from a different vantage point. As they orbited the moon, the crew saw the sunrise on the earth. The crew had wrestled with what to share with the world when this event happened because they knew it would be coming. They are 239,000 miles from Earth, and they are wondering what there is to say. They wondered what would be wise and beautiful to share with the world and they agreed they would share from Genesis 1. Depending on how old you are, or how much history you have watched or seen, maybe you remember this.

VIDEO Genesis 1 from Apollo 8

Why did that crew read from Genesis 1 on that historic day? It was not because they believe the earth was created in seven days. It was not because they believed the earth was 6000 years old. It was not because they believed they were descendants of Adam and Eve, and they now had a great view of the snake! It wasn't because they were taking a picture of the literal view of the creation account. It was because, as they sat there looking back on the earth as it turned and the sun came into view, seeing this amazing site no other humans had ever witnessed before, seeing how small our earth looked compared with the vastness of space, they felt that these poetic words were the most appropriate things they could read.

SLIDE In the beginning, God created...and said, let there be light!

What else is there to say?

What I do know is that whenever we Christians try to take what we learn in science and squish it into the Bible, so it all fits together literally, we usually end up with a mess! The most famous example of this was Galileo in the 1600s. Copernicus was a Catholic priest who first postulated that the earth revolved around the sun, and not the other way around, based on his observations. Galileo picked up on his work and made it popular which made him a target for the Roman Catholic Church. He was brought up on charges of heresy because the Scriptures

made it clear that the earth was the center of all things and that the sun revolved around the earth. Galileo was placed under house arrest, and it remains one of the most embarrassing moments in church history. Eventually, the church formally apologized, but not until hundreds of years later. Those actions by the church put us on a trajectory of conflict between science and religion which mostly is sad and tragic because up until that point science and faith coexisted with not near as much conflict as we see today.

Many bright people left the church and left faith because of actions like this, and even today most people who say they are atheist or agnostic do so not so much because of scientific evidence but because of the actions of people of faith. Today, I encourage you to think differently about science and faith and that relationship and how we read the Scriptures so we might allow room for those in the scientific community to bring their gifts and skills with them and not check them at the door. I pray instead that we will be able to focus on God's Word to us about these bigger truths.

Sometimes, even today, we believe that science and religion cannot live together because we believe evolution doesn't fit with the Scriptures, but I must tell you I don't have a problem with thinking that things have evolved and developed over time, and that God is the one which set those processes in motion. Some scientists do go on to add something to evolutionary theory by postulating that evolution is unplanned, un-purposeful, unguided, and random.

The truth is that we don't know if this is true or not and I would suggest that making this statement is actually a statement of faith. We all have a faith upon which we build our lives and saying that life is random is a faith statement as much as is saying that evolution is a part of God's creative process. When I look at creation, and the complexity and the beauty and the wonder and just this year reality that life on this planet can sustain us, I don't see it is random. I see clear evidence for Creator, and that is a faith statement on my part upon which I must be

willing to ask questions and give my answers.

I was having this conversation with a friend who is an atheist and a scientist and believes everything is random and that Darwin's theory of evolution is the only way to understand how life has evolved and that there is survival of the fittest. I always simply ask one question if this is what someone believes. Why cure cancer? Why cure illness? Why cure a pandemic and develop vaccines for Covid? Why try to save people who become ill? Why not let survival of the fittest really help us evolve as humans?

The answer I often get is that because it is humane and compassionate to help cure illness, and we should care about people. I totally agree, but that is a faith statement, and it comes from a moral and ethical imperative which is rooted in understanding of a good and loving God who wants what's best for us. I don't believe that just comes from nowhere but is something that we learn from the Scriptures and then we become a part of God's work in the world by participating in healing, developing new medical procedures, and coming up with vaccines. I believe that Genesis tells us we are made in God's image and so we live that out by loving others and using the gifts and strengths God has given to us.

I believe that God's hand is at work and everything that exists, including us working on God's behalf. I believe that God is the physician and the mathematician and the artist over everything that exists. I believe that's what Genesis 1 is describing, and that God is working through all of creation. Believing in evolution doesn't diminish my faith but actually enlarges it. Every scientific discovery gives me more insight into God's creation and leaves me in awe of what God has done, and continues to do, in the world. I find it awesome and incredible to learn new things and see how different things work. I want to give more glory to God and not less.

You may be aware that over this last year Tesla, founded by Elon

Musk, has become the most valuable automobile company in the world as they make electric cars. Ford became the most valuable car company century ago when they began developing not just the automobile but a process or system mass manufacturing. Does Elon Musk or did Henry Ford build every car? Were either one of them on the assembly line for their automobiles? Did they design every car or every component? Absolutely not, but they did have a vision and brought together resources and launched the process which for Ford continued long after his death and my guess is the same will be true for Tesla.

I want to be clear that I'm not saying Henry Ford or Elon Musk our God! Every metaphor breaks down at some point. But they both put together a system and processes that most of us don't have any clue how they work, but we sure are happy to get in the car and drive. In the same way, we don't know exactly how everything in creation works or however the process came into being, but it sure is nice to get up and take a breath every day and see the beauty around us and know that our body works mostly the way it should until it breaks down to the point of not being able to be repaired.

I don't think we need to feel threatened by new scientific discoveries. Instead, I marvel and stand in awe, and I find that almost every new scientific discovery leads to more questions than answers. Isn't that fascinating? I think it is what Buzz Aldrin had in mind when he first landed on the moon with Apollo 11. The crew was having a snack and he brought with him Holy Communion from his church which his pastor had blessed. That's one of the reasons I don't feel bad about blessing elements over the Internet anymore! He took the elements and shared them while they were on the moon and then read these words from Psalm 8.

BIBLE

**³ When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—
the moon and the stars you set in place—**

**⁴ what are mere mortals that you should think about them,
human beings that you should care for them?**

As a trained astronaut, Aldrin would've known aerospace engineering and physics and the technical details of getting to the moon and back, yet he found himself thinking about the Psalms written 2500 years earlier. Another astronaut, Jim Lovell, led the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission. He wrote this later in his autobiography.

Before the flight, I was really not a religious man. I believed in God but really had nothing to share. But, when I came back from the moon, I felt so strongly that I had something I wanted to share with others. I established high flight in order to tell all people, everywhere, that God is alive, not only on earth, but also on the moon.

It's tempting to look at scientific discoveries and think we don't need a God. We can even go to the moon and back and let go of the idea of God. I also know that we can see God in the processes if we are willing. I heard one professor say that they thought, "**mathematics was the language of God.**" We can see beautiful and elegant patterns in all of creation. We see it across the galaxy's and down to the subatomic level. I think there can be a rationality to the belief in God, based on what we observe in the world. Each week I hope to give you one more of those reasons to believe.

SLIDE Are there reasons to believe in God?

We do know that as long as Homo sapiens have been in existence, they have looked to something beyond themselves to understand why they exist. We see it in cave paintings from 40,000 years ago and more. There is always seemed to be an understanding that there is something more than ourselves. They looked at the stars and the earth around them and felt they came from somewhere and there must be something more. That seems self-evident to many of us, and it has only been in recent times that we have begun to believe we can figure out enough scientifically that we don't really need God anymore.

For many of us, however, it feels like the more we learn and explain, the more it seems to point to something bigger than ourselves. It feels like a bigger leap of faith to believe there is no intelligence behind the beautiful mathematical and scientific patterns that we see in the world. Let's not forget that long before there was a Bible, there was people of faith. There was no Bible for Moses or Abraham. Some of those who wrote the Psalms may not have had much beyond the Torah, or the first five books of our Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. The judges and the kings and the prophets had some Scripture but not all of it. They certainly didn't have the New Testament and the story of Jesus and the letters that we find from the early church.

Even without those, many of the authors looked at the creation and felt like God was speaking through the world around them. It is captured beautifully in Psalm 19.

BIBLE

- ¹ The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.***
- ² Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.***
- ³ They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.***
- ⁴ Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.***

The heavens are telling the glory of God, not just a book. That is part of why we feel something when we are on one of our beautiful mountains, or walking on a beach, or we witness a sunrise or sunset, or rainbow. They are pointing us to something more which created us and gives us something to hold onto. Everything is created as a gift to express God's love and beauty to each of us because God made us to love us. The apostle Paul put it this way in his letter to the Romans.

BIBLE

²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So, they have no excuse for not knowing God.

I believe that we are here by more than chance and it is a statement of faith, either way, to say there is a God or to claim there is no God. I find it more rational to believe there is a Creator behind all that exists. I understand all the arguments back and forth, but I thought it might be helpful for you to hear from four well-known and well-respected scientists who also are people of faith. You are going to hear from:

- Dr. Erica Carlson is a theoretical physicist and a Fulbright scholar and professor at Purdue University
- Dr. Charles Rice is a Nobel prize-winning researcher in microbiology
- Dr. Cyntia Jallad is Senior chemist who works on defense projects at MRIGlobal
- Dr. Lori Banks is research professor at Bates College and head of the Banks Laboratory
- Dr. Robert Binns is Emeritus Prof. of Physics at Washington University and is the leading researcher in the field of cosmic rays.

Each one of them shares a passion for their science and have a fundamental belief and conviction that there is a God and seek to follow Jesus Christ. Sometimes we think we can't bring together our faith in Jesus Christ and our love for science and my hope is that by hearing from them we might begin to look at this differently. As we hear from these five people, I hope it encourages you that we can love science and love Jesus.

VIDEO Scientists on Religion and Science

My hope is that we might see today that we don't have to choose between science and religion and that they actually can bless each

other. I believe that science can help us be a deeper person of faith and being a deeper person of faith can help with our scientific endeavors. I hope that in every one of the sermons that we do during this series you can wrestle with your own questions and understand that we can be thoughtful people of faith. I believe that God gave us a brain for a reason. and we can also be a deeply faithful follower of Jesus while using that brain.

Many of the most important people of science in our history were people of faith. People like Copernicus, Newton, Mendel, Heisenberg, and so many more. Many have looked at the world around us and seen in its beauty and order and complexities and grander and patterns the words of the psalmist on Psalm 8.

BIBLE

**¹ O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!
Your glory is higher than the heavens.**

They look at the Genesis story not as teaching us science or literal history, but teaching a deep fundament of truth, that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God also made us to love us so we would know we are not alone. This is echoed by the profound words of scientist and astronaut Mike Good who piloted one of the space shuttles.

SLIDE “I don't think there are many atheists sitting atop the launchpad.” –Astronaut Mike Good

I end with an invitation. To be a follower of Jesus is to make a decision of faith. I don't think we ever get 100% proof on anything, if we were honest. It really boils down to a decision. I decide this makes sense to me. I decide there is a God who and the earth and me. I decide there is a God who loves me and made me for a purpose. I believe there is a God who made the cosmos as a gift and that same God knows my name and cares about me. I believe that God came to us in Jesus, to show us who God is and who we are and whose we are; to show it's

what it means to be fully human, to love God and to love others and to find meaning and purpose in that.

You might not be ready to say yes to that God, and maybe you will be after a few more weeks of asking and wrestling with questions. But, if you are ready, it's about a simple prayer and I invite you to pray that prayer with me if it's a decision you want to make.

SLIDE **Prayer**

You might simply whisper this prayer under your breath or in your heart say these words.

Thank you, God, for everything...

Thank you for this world...

Thank you for the cosmos...

Thank you for life...

Thank you for love...

I choose to trust in you...

I choose to believe that you are...

I accept your love and grace...

Jesus, help me to follow you... To walk with you... To be your follower... Help me to love you... And help me to love others...

Lord, I thank you for all those who have joined us for this time of worship and this message. I pray you would pour out your Holy Spirit upon each of us. Help us to learn and grow and continue to ask questions so we might claim faith as our own, becoming the people you want us to be. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

January 8-9 Order

1. Josh welcomes people and says, **“Today we are going to wrestle with how we can embrace science AND our faith while asking deep and important questions.”**
2. Two Songs
3. Jeff welcomes and invites people to wave and be seated.
4. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
 - Alpha Course.
 - Mom’s Coffee and Grief Group.
 - Encourage mask wearing.
5. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
6. Sermon
7. Baptisms
8. Prayer
9. Closing song
10. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
11. Offering SLIDE and Focus (Victims of Bould Fire)
12. Care Ministers (If any are present)
13. Bless Guatemala Team
14. Closing Prayer