

GOING DEEPER STUDY NOTES (January 8, 2023)

FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

This is now the second Sunday of 2023. There is, for many, myself included, something hopeful about a New Year. Recent headlines declare “good riddance to 2022” or, “Goodbye 2022 ... and Good Riddance” or, “2022 in the bin ... Goodbye and Good Riddance!” We hope, fingers-crossed, that 2023 will be better.

2022 didn't make a lot of friends. 2022, don't let the calendar door hit you on your way out. Don't we say the same every year? When was the last time a year was so perfect we refused to let it go? Let's keep 2022 until May! And, why do we think a change in a number is going to make things better? From the common sentiment I hear, things seem to be moving in the opposite direction, and quickly.

And yet I'm still hopeful. Where does my hope, your hope, come from? The hope I feel, that Christians feel, comes from the lingering and beautiful miracle of Christmas. Hope, for me, starts there.

Something so unbelievably powerful happened in Bethlehem that first Christmas. The impact of that miracle is still changing lives today, mine too. I enter the New Year with hope even though I know nations will mistreat their citizens, leaders and tyrants will reach beyond their own borders for what is not theirs, employers will sacrifice their employees to increase profit, the vulnerable will be abused, the lonely shunned, the hungry and mentally ill ignored, entertainers will be paid more than teachers and social workers. Lies will flow freely, and genuine love withheld. Christian faith knows things will not go well in the New Year, but I am still hope-filled because God is with us in the middle of the mess ... from January 1 to December 31 and beyond.

God has not left us to figure out today, tomorrow, the coming year on our own. God has not left us to fix the problems in this world, in our community, in our homes, in our own lives, on our own. The miracle of Christmas is a definitive act of God that declares, “Immanuel, God is with us.” He made that promise. He keeps that promise. There is nothing more hopeful. Here at Grace 2023 is an opportunity for us to trust God in new and exciting ways. Regardless of my bank account, the global economy, my medical situation, the posturing and evil of world leaders, diminished hearing, increased indifference, I stand on hope because The Creator of all things stands with me, with us.

This morning brings a change in our Sunday sermon series. We will be focusing our attention throughout this coming year on the book of Genesis. Genesis is the first book of the Bible and literally means, “Beginning.” This may be one of the most challenging sermon series I've ever been a part of. What the book of Genesis brings up will

make us uncomfortable. We will face questions about our origin, questions about our identity, questions about God's design for our relationships, questions about our responsibility for the environment, questions about the source of evil, and our response to evil. Genesis will stretch us, challenge us, demand we practice the grace in our name and the respect for others on our lips. This study will reveal the true condition of our soul. And so, with a bit of nervousness, but with even more hope, we begin chapter 1, verse 1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This is our story, God's too.

In the Beginning (Genesis 1:1-5)

¹“1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³And God said, ‘Let there be light.’ and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”

What DOES IT SAY?

1. What do these opening verses in Genesis tell us about how the world began? What do they say about how the world *did not* begin?
2. What does this passage say about God's power and desire?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. What does “In the beginning” mean?
4. What does “And God said ... and there was” mean?
5. What does “the Spirit of God” mean?

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?

6. How do you think the world, the universe, began?
7. What would you say to a person who claims to be a Christian but believes God created using an evolutionary process?
8. What is the main point in these opening verses of the Bible?

As you spend time praying remember that prayer is meant to be the most natural, easy, and empowering, part of your day. Prayer is talking to God, and God talking to you. Ask God to help you be more respectful of others. Ask God for greater understanding and grace.

God will help us because He created us, and He loves us.