

Today Counts Show Episode 116

Jim: A lot of people got this wrong idea about Jesus and about Christianity, as somehow the narrative has gotten changed that God doesn't care about sin. You know, he just loves us all and he's forgiving of us all. No, God hates sin. I don't know how the culture has slid to confuse that. The other side of that—

Hey, everyone. We are back with part two of In the Beginning: A Conversation on Genesis 1:1 with Jim Piper, Matt Martin, and Winston Harris. Let's jump in.

Winston Harris: In the question, you what was God doing before in the beginning? Ecclesiastes 3 says, God sets eternity in the heart, in the hearts of men. And so there's this appetite to want to go beyond time, right? To also transcend time, right? There is a desire that almost beckons us into this curiosity that there has to be more, there has to be a creator, right? Whether you say agnostic or atheist, at your core, you cannot get away from this innate ability to recognize it's not just what we see, that things aren't just as they are, but there is more. And then some of us are more courageous than others to actually pursue that appetite. But that question in and of itself is humanity, right? It is, "Man, what was God doing? I wanna know, and it's that appetite that almost sustains us in our pursuit of who is he? Who is this God that has no beginning and has no end that speaks to who he is, the fact that we have that desire. So it's this interesting relationship that we see where God set that in us to find him, if you will.

Jim: I've always loved that verse. I had a guest on the show last week and we were talking about dying and the graces and the theology of death. And she said something that I never had really thought of before. I'm kind of jumping off of your statement, Winston, about eternity in the hearts of men. When she started talking about, and we're not talking yet about the fall or sin, but here we are, well, it's okay, we're gonna talk about the fall and sin a little bit. But he said, in God's kindness-- I mean, a lot of people got this wrong idea about Jesus and about Christianity, as somehow the narrative has gotten changed that God doesn't care about sin. You know, he just loves us all and he's forgiving of us all. No, God hates sin. And in fact, he massacred sin on the cross. He absolutely declared all-out war against sin on the cross. And I don't know how the culture has slid to confuse. that the other side of that is his incredible love for us. And then what Whitney said, the dear lady I was interviewing this last week, she said, and in God's kindness, he doesn't make us stay in these fallen bodies forever. He finally lets us loose from these bodies.

Winston Harris: That's good.

Jim: We don't have to live 800 years anymore or a thousand years anymore. You know, we're 70 and out, 80 and out, you know, maybe 100 and out. And I just thought, "Gosh, I never really thought of it that way," because we tend to call death the last enemy and it is, but she had such a great way with her words and she's such a good writer. She said at the point of death is when-- Death and heaven are just like a slice of piece of paper away from one another. It comes that close and you can just sense God's goodness there. But what were we talking about?

Matt: I think I might be able to get us back. I doubt it, but I'm gonna try. So it was kind of the question, what was God doing before?

Jim: Oh, yeah.

Matt: But I think the idea here also is, and God don't miss a trick and, know, in sentence structure and all of this matters. But let's just look at, and now the Bible was written, this part of the Bible was written in Hebrew. So let's look at our English structures, sentence structure that we have. In the beginning, God, created the heavens and the earth. So the subject is God, the subject. What we're talking about is God, the verb here being created, and then the object being the heaven and the earth. The problem here is we get our eyes off of the subject and we put it on the object. And so, and then we're trying to answer our questions through the lens of the object and not through the lens of the subject. Because the word, you know, the subject, God is used like 35, plus times. I mean, if you read Genesis one, it's just over and God and God and God, you know, it's just over and over and over. And we know we always go wrong when we focus on us, the object, instead of where this is. So if I can, and you know, again, I'm probably being a little philosophical here in how I'm saying this, but if my filter can be back through who the subject is, who this is really about. We're trying to make it about us, you know, because we live in the confounds of time, but really the Bible starts with who it's really all about. The subject, the who is God.

Jim: Yeah, even when it's us, we're wanting to know, "What are you God going to do with us?"

Matt: There you go. Yeah, that's good.

Jim: Yeah. Let me talk a little bit about Genesis one one and have you guys add some color commentary. So, yeah, in the beginning, in the beginning of time, God created the heavens and the earth. I'm going to take off right where Matt left off, God. You know what this text teaches us in this whole first chapter is who God is. I mean, at least this is the beginning of it. So by explaining God in this way, that God created the heavens and the earth, there's an idea called

deism, meaning that God is beyond us, but not active in this world. So that eradicates that idea. You're active in what you create. So there is no God out there who is not attached here. And then of course there's atheism that says there is no God. This says there is God. And then there's pantheism that says everything is God and no God has separated himself from this. And then there's polytheism where it says there's many gods but they are finite, they are limited in their power. And we know that even the Israelites had some form of polytheism, and thus they struggle with idolatry and those kinds of things.

But what we're introduced here now is Christianity is theism, meaning there is an infinite God who is beyond this universe, yet he's involved in this universe. He is the God of the universe. And that is who is being introduced to us. There's also some hints of some Christian doctrine that I know a lot of us get tripped up in. And the word Trinity is not used in the Bible, but it's kind of a label, an umbrella label that we try to describe the community of God, that he is one, yet three separate personalities, three separate persons, three separate, and you know, we go on and on with synonyms, because we just don't have the language to describe who God is. But not to get into an area where it is not-- I cannot say that I'm a linguistic scholar but what is clear here is when the word God here is used, it comes from this root of Eloi or Elohim, which has a hint of plural versus singular. And then when you take in the next word, created, in the beginning, God created, is the word bara, which is only used in God's activity, and it's only used to express something brand new. And we're not on verse two, but when you look at verse two, it talks about the Spirit of God hovering. So you're introduced to God, then you're introduced into the Spirit of God. And as we know later on in Genesis 1, there's a statement that says, "Let us, let us."

And I don't know about you, but When I read Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth," I immediately just, my mind just goes to John 1:1. "In the beginning was the word," right? "And the word was with God and the word was God." And of course, it goes into the creation account after that. I mean, Genesis 1:1 is something that it is easy to talk about for an hour. I mean, we could talk about it even longer than that. And the last thing I would say and then turn it over to you guys. So in the beginning, beginning of time, God created the heavens and the earth, the heavens, and the earth, the seen and the unseen. Anything that exists other than himself, he created. That is the foundational, "Let me introduce myself."

Matt: Right. Yeah. But before all things, in all things, and through all things. And that just, our brains just want to explode when we think of that.

Jim: It's good news though, right? Because otherwise we just stare up at the sky and we go, "How'd that get there? Where am I?" And we have a message. Why do we push back so much on the message? Why do we push back so much? I mean, John Piper wrote a book that said, "God is the gospel." Obviously, he's backing up using a wide-angle lens and he's just saying, man, it's good news that there is a God.

Matt: Yeah. Yes.

Jim: Right? I mean, that that is the good news. And the future doesn't rely upon us. He's got this. I mean, that's a big deal. If this is such good news? Why does the majority-- I think that's accurate. Maybe it's not, maybe it's not. But why does it seem like a good portion of humanity and maybe the majority rejects it?

Winston Harris: I have some conversations with some good friends, similar to this one. And the conversation came up about the agency that we have. And if you think about a timeless God who creates a construct to be in relationship with his creation, understanding what it would take for him to be in relationship. And later on in the scriptures, it tells us Jesus is the lamb slain from the foundations of the earth. So coming back to this beginning idea, God had to decide what it would take to be in relationship with his creation. There is this agency that creation has specific to humans, specific to man, male and female, and this willpower, if you will, this ability to choose and understanding that if God loves His creation, He can't force us to love Him back, so we do have to have the ability to reject or accept Him. And He considered that reality of rejection, and Christ covers the potential for us to reject God, which creates the sin potential in the world. God has already considered all of these things. And so within us, we live with this constant reality that we have willpower. And I think for me, you know, when you come to scripture and it tells us that our heart is deceptive, who can trust it?

You know, another way might be to look at our willpower, our ability to make decisions is deceptive. And we think we have more power than we actually do. And so when we are confronted with this idea that there is something more powerful than us, when we live in a time and an age and a space that tells us, you know, live your own life, you know, pursue your dreams, do all of these things and you think you have more power than you do, only to be confronted with the gospel that tells you you're weak, you're broken, you actually aren't as powerful as you are. It is a bit offensive and I think, Jim, you've said this before, but the gospel is a dangerous message. This idea that there is a God who is all-powerful definitely rubs up against our willpower. And I think a lot of people, for different reasons obviously, have trusted more in their willpower than his power. And willpower is only to be used to be submitted to his power. That's when we fully see the most powerful forms of ourselves is when we submit to his power.

Jim: Yeah, I think of the word surrender, you know. Surrender is a difficult word for us because there is a clash of the wills between us and God and in fact, that's going to come up this weekend. It has to, it's just part of what peace is about. And again, we're not even close to talking about the fall, but boy, it's easy to go there, right? I mean, I think that we, back to what I was saying about Whitney and God's goodness and kindness of not sentencing us in these bodies forever because humanity isn't getting better. We know that. But the devastation of the fall, when I think about how the gospel, can take root is when we finally see things from God's perspective. And when we can see things from God's perspective-- Every time I think I'm a good

golfer, the best thing I can do is find a PGA Pro and play around with him. It just brings me back to reality. And it makes you go, "You know, I should just be happy that I'm out here enjoying the weather." There's just something about truth that is cleansing and it's helpful.

I wanted to read Romans 1:20. You guys are familiar with this and this is Paul's dissertation about God's wrath on righteousness. Now that's not a scriptural title. The forematters of my Bible have that as a caption at the top. It's not exactly what you call seeker-friendly, God's wrath on unrighteousness, but what he's doing he's making a case where we deserve punishment if we try to stand on our own merits, right? And so verse 20 says it this way, "For his invisible attributes," speaking of God. "For his invisible attributes namely His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived." I like the word seen better. This translation says perceived. "Have been clearly seen ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made so they are without excuse."

You know, I think that what I would throw into- the question that I threw out to you guys is that I think one of the reasons why we don't receive-- I'm trying to think how I want to say this. I think if you read Genesis 1:1 to the vast majority of humanity, they'll embrace it. And if they do embrace it, they have hope as they continue to get through the story of the Bible. But there are stumbling blocks along the way. And I think what happened to me this week as I was really contemplating some things and thinking about some things is I think the reason why people push back is not because they don't believe in God. I think it's because they're angry with God. But that comes back, Winston, to kind of what you were talking about. You know, it's a clash of the wills. "I'm angry with God because he seems to get his way and I don't get my way." And I don't know that we cognitively say that. But I think that's kind of how it plays out. So what I love about Genesis 1:1, it's kind of like a reset. You know, are you willing to grab your cup of coffee, get up in the morning, open your Bible, and hey, let's just start again. And as you do that, you're going to be introduced to the possibility, I don't know that Adam and Eve could have lived forever. I don't know that, but it appears to be a possibility. And they are our representatives. And as we all know, you can't contain sin in one person or in one community. It affects everybody. It's like in the ecosystem of some sort. You know, it's weird. Like with Matt, I can get kind of philosophical and it's like in the air, you know? It's like tuberculosis. It's just like in the air, you can try to dig a shelter somewhere, but you've already been polluted.

Matt: You've been exposed. You've already been exposed.

Jim: Yeah, you've been exposed.

Matt: I think you said something a while ago, Jim, that as we've walked through this idea that I can open the Bible, majority of people can open a Bible and you know you can even find comfort in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. I looked it up in Psalm 93, it says that your throne is established from of old, you are from everlasting. So that God is the--

He's uncreated, he wasn't created. So that, you know, we're wrapping our head around that. But when I, when I have confidence, because you'd already mentioned, I think it's bora or however you want to say it in Hebrew, B-O-R-A, you know, it's a limited word in the Hebrew there used because it means created from nothing. And it's a faith element. I mean, I think we all can come to that, but it takes faith to believe in anything that you know.

Jim: Exactly. Yeah, faith is an active reality.

Matt: That's it. If I'm an atheist, I have faith that there is no God. If I'm an agnostic, I have faith that, you whatever. But that you said reset, it made me think about this, that in all the chaos that can go on in my world, in my limited finite world, whether I created it or somebody around me created it and I'm having to live in this, there's something settling about when I sit down and you said it, it's made me think of it. Grab the cup of coffee, open my Bible, and say that God who was not created, so there's no limitation on him. There's no nothing on him.

Jim: Yeah, the uncaused cause.

Matt: There you go, that he started all of this and he has a plan and his creation lacks nothing. Even in what we would consider incomplete or undone or wish we could be, it's not, his creation lacks nothing. And that I can find the comfort and the solace in that to sit down and say, "Okay, this book is going to lead, guide, comfort, instruct, whatever it is for the day, for the moment, for the hour."

Jim: You know, when you were mentioning the Psalm, I was reminded of not to beat a dead horse, but I was reminded of Psalm 90, where it's attributed to Moses. It says, "A prayer of Moses, the man of God." I mean, it's just another sample proof or evidence that he did have pen and paper and he was busy, you know, doing whatever he was doing, even though it's located in the book of Psalm.

Matt: You know, there's something else that I've read a while back. Winston talked about the kind of this fairy tale idea. You know, somebody say, "Well, the Bible, you know, is made up or whatever." But God shows humanity. Obviously, you know, we're going to get to the fall and on, you know, we'll walk through all of that. But when we're born into this world, we believe that we're God ordained, we're knit together by the hand of God in our mother's womb. And we believe that. So in the beginning, God. So we start out in the beginning, even in our own lives. But if you look, I've read this years ago, the last words of Genesis, so it starts with "in the beginning, God," but the last words in Genesis is "in a coffin." And it's talking about Joseph, he was taken back, but he was in a coffin. But we see the gospel and we see mankind put together so well in the book of Genesis. And you talk about the gospel is presented, it's presented very

clearly in Genesis 3. We'll get there. But I think there's part of it that I have to understand even the reality of God to humanity. You start with God, yes, God created, you were born because God has a purpose for you in this world. But in this fallen world, it ends in a coffin, most likely. And so the book of Genesis kind of frames that even frames that part of it.

Jim: Yeah, that's good. That's good. Yeah, I think that I wanted to share this with you guys too. And for those who are listening to this podcast, whether you're listening to an audio or listen to it on YouTube, I want to do a little commercial for a book that I read some years ago by John Lennox. And I'm to hold it up for those who can see the video. Seven Days that Divide the World, because this is about where we're about to enter into here coming up soon. I found this to be very refreshing. I did not find it too heady. I mean, it's heady, but it's more philosophically heavy than it is scientifically heavy. Although, you know, he references and attributes a lot of thoughts to science. He does a really good job of truly explaining who the intended authors are or not authors, readers. But again, this is for those who can't see, it's Seven Days that Divide the World subtitle is The Beginning According to Genesis and Science. I don't know that I agree with everything in the book, but that's not the point. I'm not here to hand out candy bars. We're here to have, you know, a great conversation about something really important. The author is John C. Lennox. It was a blessing. And I forget how I had learned about it. I think I was listening to something like this and someone referenced that and I got it and consumed it in a few weeks. And I was looking at it today and pulled it out of my library because I want to kind of go through all my highlighted sections in preparation for our next podcast.

All right, so what we did today is we- what we accomplished today is we laid the book of Genesis out for everybody and We have this vision. I hope that we can get through it. 50 chapters is a lot. I hope that we get through it, but this Genesis 1:1. We just felt kind of needed a session or two by itself to kind of set the pace, the front porch and there are so many bizarre stories in the book of Genesis that you don't want to miss it. So I hope that you will join us and that you'll stick with us. Pastor Matt and Pastor Winston will be regular on this and we're going to just keep getting better at it, I think. And I really appreciate you guys joining me today. Any last thoughts?

Winston Harris: It's gonna be a wild ride.

Matt: I was going to say, "Winston always says it well," so he's exactly right. It's going to be a wild ride and there's, you know. I think you said it earlier, Jim, don't read Genesis too fast, and don't miss some of the simplicity. It is complex and it is deep in areas, but in some of it, don't read it too fast and just don't miss the simplicity of really how we're going to see the gospel played out.

Jim: Yeah, thanks for saying that because there's one more thing I would say that I think can help those of us, those who want to take the journey with us over these years.

[laughter]

Matt: Wow.

Jim: It's gonna take a minute. But people get maybe a little too over the top about the science thing. And I know I got a lot of fellow believers who want to defend scripture and show the science in it. And you know, I get that, I'm okay with that, but when I-- I'm not sure God is giving a science lesson to everybody. But here's what I also believe. I don't believe that science has yet, nor can prove the Bible wrong. So I look at it just from reverse. I don't look at it, what is the intent of what we're reading? Who is the audience? What is meant to say this? And obviously, yes, folks, we have to talk about whether it's an old earth or a new earth. And even in Christendom, a lot of people get mad about all that stuff. And so we'll talk about that. And I'm not sure why you would believe us more than anyone else, but we'll definitely talk about that.

Matt: We're gonna make it sound believable.

Jim: Yeah.

Matt: We're going to let Winston say it. When he says it, it's—

Jim: Yeah, that's good. So Winston wordsmith this for us. That'll be the title of that. And we do need to have at least one podcast that is entitled The Necessary Mystery. That just has to happen. That has to happen.

Winston Harris: This whole segment should be the necessary mystery. Genesis, a necessary mystery.

Jim: Or a messy beginning but here we are. All right, guys. Well, thank you and we'll get at this again.

Matt: Sounds good, thank you.