



## Theme

*An Invitation to a Bigger Reality: How ancient texts and modern science can help me find a more satisfying (& more beautiful) life.*

## Rationale

We – modern, western, enlightened people that we are – live in what the philosopher, Charles Taylor, describes as an “immanent frame.”<sup>1</sup> It’s a “frame” or box that traps our lives (indeed, our very imagination) within a purely natural, material, and secular realm. It’s a closed system which places the entirety of our lives within space and time. We didn’t choose to see the world this way. We were just born into it, into this “Secular Age.” Our beliefs are haunted by doubts, and our doubts are haunted by the sense that there must be more.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes we get a glimpse of something bigger. Reality feels Personal. There must be a greater purpose or reason behind all this. Flowers & sunsets, stars & hummingbirds, they feel purposefully beautiful. I feel that I must be more than a complex mammal, my relationships must be more than utilitarian, and my life’s work must point to something beyond itself. Even my brokenness, my wronging and being wronged, it begs for explanation and satisfaction beyond what this life seems to give.

The goal of this sermon series is to invite people to see the bigger reality, to “open the skylights” in our closed off worldview.<sup>3</sup>

When we listen to what the Scriptures say about origins, humanity, work, marriage, and sin, we come face to face with a much bigger reality. Genesis 1-4 reveals that we are living in a world filled with goodness and glory, a veritable Temple. Humans are of inestimable value, bearing the very image of our Divine King. Relationships are not simply something we *ought* to have, but rather we need others to *be* who we are created to be.<sup>4</sup> Work and rest are charged with meaning, purpose, and beauty. Even our sins point us to Something beyond us – namely Christ and Re-Creation in Him.

In approaching the text as *an invitation to a bigger reality*,<sup>5</sup> I will also seek to show how this does not negate scientific inquiry. In this bigger reality, science is a great tool that points us to God (Natural

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<sup>1</sup> See James Smith’s helpful summary, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, p. 92ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3ff. For a contemporary depiction of the predicament of life in this “Secular Age,” see the movie *Room*. It’s the story of a teenage girl who is kidnapped and forced to live in “room” (a shed) for the next 7 years. While she is in captivity, she has a son. This boy has only, ever known “room.” In order to protect her son, she tells him that there is nothing outside. “Room” is all there is. We watch the boy struggle to make sense of all of life within the limitations of “room.” But, in the roof of “room” is a skylight, a glimpse of outside. *Hint*: We are the boy in *Room*.

<sup>3</sup> This language comes from Taylor. See Smith, p. 93. (I might make this a major metaphor for the sermon series. I’m imagining a giant box on the stage with skylights in the ceiling as a visual...)

<sup>4</sup> I think Dietrich Bonhoeffer is on to something when he argues from the creation narrative that relationships are not merely a *moral* necessity but they are an *ontological* necessity. See Bonhoeffer’s *The Communion of Saints: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church*.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, a relationship with the God of the Universe is at the center of this. *Cf.* Colossians 1:15-19.

Theology) and allows us to reflect Him, bringing order to chaos and creating something that is “very good.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, when we live in this bigger reality, scientific inquiry has a doxological end (as does marriage and work and rest and all of life).<sup>7</sup>

The challenge of this series is to help my congregation “see” the Scriptures, especially Genesis 1-4, for what I believe it is: a beautiful, mysterious, trustworthy, and glorious invitation into relationship with the God who made us for relationship with Him.<sup>8</sup> I plan on doing this by:

- planting the text firmly in its ANE context, which “solves” many of our modern problems with the narrative;
- presenting examples of how scientific inquiry can have a doxological end;<sup>9</sup>
- focusing on how (despite their simplicity) these stories give better, more satisfying answers to the questions that are most important to us (e.g. identity, purpose, etc.);
- studying a lot and praying even more.

### **Sermons**

Sermon 1. *The Song of Creation*.<sup>10</sup>

Text: Genesis 1:1–2:3

Sermon 2. *Undoing the Lies: How the Scriptures won’t let us buy into myths, ancient or modern*

Texts: Genesis 1–2; Psalms 89 & 104

Sermon 3. *We Could Be Royals: How we are created to reflect the image of the Divine King*

Text: Genesis 1:26–28; 2:4–25

Sermon 4. *Not How It’s Supposed To Be: How an piece of fruit and a talking snake give a compelling explanation of our lives and our world*

Text: Genesis 3–4, esp. 3:1–15

Sermon 5. *A Bigger Reality: How Christ invites us to find a more satisfying (& more beautiful) life with Him.*

Text: John 1:1-14; Colossians 1:15-19

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<sup>6</sup> In his book, *Culture Making*, Andy Crouch helpfully points out that in forming man & woman, God took something already made “good” & made something “very good.” He argues that we do the same kind of thing, reflecting God, when we make “very good” widgets or music or art or books or whatever we make in our vocation.

<sup>7</sup> See Psalm 8:3; 19; et al.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Foster helpfully calls this the “with God” life. See Foster’s *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*.

<sup>9</sup> Featured speakers, Drs. Jennifer Wiseman (astrophysicist) and Jeff Schloss (biologist), excel at this. We will also have focus group members share about their faith/intellectual journeys.

<sup>10</sup> Tim Keller deserves credit here. Some years ago, I heard him refer to Genesis 1 as a “song” in one of his lectures. While Genesis 1 might not technically be a “song,” I think he is right to present it as such for hermeneutical purposes.

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