

## Who Gets to Narrate the Universe? Part One

Today I'm starting a series that will be three or so sermons called Who Gets to Narrate the Universe? But first, a little introduction.

This summer, the U.S. House of Representatives Oversight Committee held public hearings about UAPs, that's Unidentified Anomalous Phenomenon—what used to be called UFOs. And last year, a different House subcommittee held their own hearings, and they showed videos. You may recall some of these meetings.

It's unprecedented that this discussion would be held at that level and in public and on the record. The hearings revealed that U.S. pilots continue to report unexplained encounters with UAPs. The objects don't seem to have any means of propulsion and don't seem to have any control services like an aircraft would. They're reported to travel at amazing speeds and turn very sharply. Sometimes they're tracked on radar, other times they're not.

Sightings seem to happen more often near where nuclear weapons are held. And in fact, it's been claimed, on the record, that these UAPs have deactivated nuclear missiles.

There's a whistleblower, you'll remember his name or hear it after today a lot, I'm sure, named David Grush, and he served for 14 years as an intelligence officer in the Air Force and National Geospatial Intelligence Agency. He claimed in public and on the record in those committee hearings that our government has retrieved alien “biologics,” he called them: non terrestrial bodies. He also alleged that there's been a massive cover up about all of this.

So, here's the question: Are these highly sophisticated military craft developed by the United States? Or could they be something that's been perpetrated by one of our earthly enemies? Or, as the whistleblowers are claiming on the record and in public, are these things extraterrestrial, presumably from some super advanced, vastly superior beings?

When I was a kid back home in Knoxville, we had a local television station that featured a movie every day, and every week had a theme. I remember particularly Science Fiction Week. Loved that. There was also Tarzan Week, for example. During Science Fiction Week, they played the 1953 Academy Award winning movie “War of the Worlds.” And you go back and look at it now and it just seems so cheesy.

The movie was based upon the novel by H.G. Wells, of the same title, which was written all the way back in 1897. This movie had a profound impact upon me. You may recall in your American history that in 1936, Orson Wells, no relation, did a mock radio broadcast reading parts of H.G. Wells' “War of the Worlds.” Many people supposedly thought that it was real, and it caused a lot of panic.

The idea behind “War of the Worlds,” the novel, is that there is life on Mars and it is not benevolent, but rather malevolent. The creatures come to Earth to invade and to kill and to destroy. And that kind of image has been one that has seeped into our consciousness about aliens and spacecraft and so on and so forth.

Why in the world, why in the universe, would I take precious time in our worship services to talk about this stuff? Well, I’ve got to tell you, I’m not all that interested in space aliens and spaceships and that kind of thing, or the idea of extraterrestrial life. But I want to be really clear what I am interested in.

About a year ago, I told a ministry colleague, and it was during a period of time that just seemed like there was just all kinds of stuff hitting us— the feeling when you’re waiting for the next shoe to drop about some sort of big deal. I told that ministry colleague that I thought the next big deal would be some sort of revelation about extraterrestrial life, and that that thing had the potential of disrupting society and the potential of frightening people.

Now, whether all this stuff has a demonic source somehow is a subject for a sermon later in the series. But I’m absolutely certain that our ancient enemy, Satan, would use this to sow fear or doubt or concern or chaos or bring confusion or undermine.

What I’m really interested in doing in this series is to address very carefully the questions that are being raised and the assumptions that are being made. Why? Because the questions that are being raised and the assumptions that are being made are being made and posed not by Christians with a Christian worldview but by the media and by politicians and by scientists and by whistleblowers. So, they are setting the narrative.

I think it’s vitally important that we Christians maintain God’s story and set the narrative from a Christian perspective because these are big, existential questions. What does “existential” mean? The nature of existence. So, I now want to list for you bullet points of some of the questions and assumptions that are being posed by the media and politicians and whistleblowers.

There on your outline you’ve been given a little space that you can jot some of these down or make notes to yourself. I’m pulling these from news sources that I’ve been collecting over the last few weeks.

1. A Harvard physicist searching for UFO evidence says humanity, “will view alien intelligence like God.” He also predicted that the scientific discovery of an alien civilization one that may potentially be billions of years old will prompt humanity to unify. To unify did you hear that? Prompt humanity to unify. What will finally bring unity to the people of earth? An alien intelligence that’s supposedly billions of years ahead of us?

2. Here's another one. One commentator said that what our government has in its possession will completely change, quote, our understanding of the universe and our place in it. Arthur C. Clarke, the famous science fiction writer, once wrote, "We are either alone in the universe or we are not. There are only two possibilities." One commentator said about that quote, "Either of those is, equally terrifying."
3. Here's a snippet from another article. "The decades long saga of unidentified flying objects is barreling headlong toward one of two stunning conclusions. Either the U.S. Government has mounted an extraordinary decades-long cover up of actual UFO retrieval and reverse engineering, or elements of the defense and intelligence establishment are engaging in a staggeringly brazen, psychological disinformation campaign. Either possibility would have profound implications for democracy, the role of government, and perhaps humanity's place in the cosmos."
4. "Although alien revelations would shake the public trust in government to its core, this that trust might be rebuilt on the paradigm shifting knowledge that humanity is not alone in the cosmos."
5. David Grush, the whistleblower I was telling you about earlier, said this: He is aware of evidence that would cause an ontological crisis for people. Now, that's interesting to me because I like big words, and it's also interesting to me because it's a word we use a lot in theology, "ontological." What does that mean? It basically means the nature of being. So, he's saying what he has seen with his own eyes would cause a crisis in people that would burrow all the way down to the nature of being. Listen, beloved, that's a big question. That's a big assumption.

Christians need to know how to respond to this stuff. What might all of this mean for faith, for our beliefs, for our understanding of the Bible? For the future? Maybe you're sure and certain that it wouldn't shake your faith, and all of you all are above average. Beloved, I believe that.

But what about the faith of your average Christian? The average person who calls themselves a Christian? Suppose advanced alien civilizations and spacecraft are somehow revealed to be real.

Might some Christians view alien intelligence like God, like the Harvard physicist said? Maybe.

Might some Christians look to a supposedly superior intelligence or the government to unify us?

Might some Christians be frightened at the thought that we aren't alone in the universe?

Might some Christians be deeply shaken about their own origins, their ontology, how they came to be, and what their place is in the cosmos?

Might some Christians wonder if a superior intelligence somehow undermines belief in Jesus or a creator God?

Yes, some Christians might. And to some degree, you might, too, depending upon what “truths” are revealed. We must have a Christian response.

If I were to boil down into one concise nugget why some of us might be shaken by these kinds of questions, why some believers might have a really hard time with revelations about aliens or spacecraft, it would be this: Their God and his story is too small.

If you are a believer and you are shaken by these things, it could be that your God and his story is way too small.

I'm titling this series. “Who Gets to Narrate the Universe?” And that title is kind of a take on a book by my mentor, Dr. Robert Webber. The very last book that he published was called *Who Gets to Narrate the World?* What he was talking about in that book is God's big story, the story of life, the universe, and everything.

What he was seeing was a coming clash between these stories: the Christian story and the Muslim story. He was writing this at the time of a lot of attacks by extremist Muslims, and he was writing this at a time when we had a lot of terrorist threats. And he said, there's a big clash here between two competing narratives, and we need to talk about that.

Well, I felt like that needed to be expanded. Now, I'm indebted to him for some of the outline and contours of the content that I'm going to give today, but I feel like his scope needs to be expanded to say instead, “who's going to narrate the universe?” Is it going to be God's story, or is it going to be Harvard physicists or whistleblowers or government entities or the media, something like that?

Here's what Weber writes in *Who Gets to Narrate the World?* Listen very carefully, would you? “The fullness of God's story has been lost. God's story suffers from reductionism and privatism. That is to say, the Christian faith has been reduced to just a few doctrines of self-interest.”

And then he tells a story: “In my own background, my dad, who was a missionary, and his pastor friends concentrated almost exclusively on five doctrines sin: sacrificial atonement [one way to look at the atoning death of Christ on the cross], conversion, sanctification and pre-millennialism” [meaning part of the elaborate schemes about how and when Jesus is going to come back. And he's pointing particularly to Darby and others who were talking about this system by which they can understand when and where God will come back.]

“What was missing,” he says, “was a thoroughgoing connection between creation, incarnation and recreative acts of God, such as the resurrection and the restoration of all creation. My dad, though a devoted Christian and passionate preacher, lost the fullness of the Christian story because he created a story around five pieces of the puzzle instead of the whole picture.”

And here's the most important bit. Listen to this one especially carefully: “The Christian faith was reduced to the problem of my sin, the work of Christ for me, the necessity of my conversion, and the expectation of my faithfulness to live like a Christian. I was made the center

of the story. I needed to invite Jesus into my life and my journey so he could walk with me and bless my life and my ministry.”

But, beloved, God calls us into his story, and we are privileged to enter into it. God, the divine narrator is saying, I have a purpose for humanity. I have a purpose for creation. I'm not asking your permission for me to join your story, though. You get to. I'm asking you to join, God says, my narrative of all of history and all of creation.

Wow. It gives me goosebumps just to say that. The divine Godhead is inviting us to enter into his narration. So what narrative are we going to follow? Which narrators are we going to listen to? We can't cede the answer to life's problems, especially the really big ones, the ontological ones to whistleblowers and politicians and folks in the media and scientists.

We, the Church, are witnesses to God's story. We, the Church, must be able to tell God's big story and to do it in the full and to do it with much conviction.

Again, from Weber. Listen very carefully: “God's big story, the one delivered by the apostles to their successors in the early Church, was not nearly so much my narrative as it was God's. And God speaks his narrative through the Bible. God's story is about the whole world, all of creation, from the very beginning to the very end, and includes all the nations and governments of the world, and includes the earth, sun, and sky. It includes the entire universe. And this story even includes you.” I love that.

Therefore, today I want to lay out a foundation that we will set the entirety of this series on. And it is nothing more or less than God's big story. And I want you to be able to tell it. So here are the broad contours of it:

We often say God's story has three parts: Creation, Incarnation, Re-creation. That's a good, concise way to do it, but I want to flesh that out a little bit today, especially in light of what we're talking about and the questions that we're going to be asking over the course of the next couple of weeks.

So, instead, there are seven parts, and you have them right there in front of you in your outline, and I want you to say them with me.

Creation. Fall. Incarnation. Crucifixion. Resurrection. Ascension. Re-creation.

That is God's big story.

Again, my main task today is to lay these out, get them in our heads, get them in our voices, and set that narrative, God's big story, as the foundation for all that we talk about in the next couple of weeks.

Now, I've left you some space next to each one of those in your outline, and I want to give you some talking points, say a little something about it, and then read some Scripture that will help you point to those things in your conversations with people about aliens and extraterrestrial

intelligence and spacecraft. Not to mention, and most especially, the questions that are being raised about these things and the assumptions that are being made.

Number one. Creation. Once there was nothing. Now there is everything. That's because the Godhead, the Three and the One created it. God created the heavens and the Earth.

And at the pinnacle of his creation is humankind. Now, beloved, this great Creator, God, chose humankind to bear his image. We forget that.

We bear the image and likeness of God. Did he do that somewhere else in the universe? I don't know. But I do know this: Scripture tells me that I'm an image bearer of the Creator. Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth."

There it is. Before all time, God did this. Once there was nothing. Now there is everything. And God is the one who did it.

Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. Let us make man in our own image."

Creation. Say it with me.

Creation. Next comes what? The Fall. Evil now enters the story.

And listen, it's not some spiritualized, metaphorical evil, but it is demonic and also human: It's the demonic and also human response of rebellion against a Creator God. Sadly, humankind revolts against God, too.

Good and evil are warring with each other, and they have been ever since. We forget that good and evil are at odds with one another. And when the Fall happened, all of creation was flopped upside down, turned on its head.

That's what sin and disobedience and rebellion against the Creator does. But God makes a promise that he will reunite all of creation with Himself and with his own two hands. Two scriptures for you:

Genesis 3:6: "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and she ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it."

That's where the Fall happens. That's where the disobedience happens. And here's this promise that I mentioned:

Genesis 3:15: "And God said to the serpent, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."

That's the Fall. Say it with me. The Fall.

So, we've got Creation, Fall. What comes next? Incarnation. God himself becomes incarnate.

You may say, "Pastor Chris. Do Christians believe in incarnation?" Yes. It happened once and in spectacular fashion. The God of the Universe rescues all of creation by becoming Earthbound. So, in some ways, God's story does figure very prominently in the story of Earth. But that's not all. And he did it not so much by stepping into Earth's story. You hear that sometimes. You hear that language about God stepping into our reality.

Oh, my goodness, no. He doesn't do it so much by stepping into earth's story. He did it by reestablishing his own story. He did it by becoming his creation. Christ, the Savior of the universe, is the perfect joining together of heaven and earth. The perfect one.

Two Scriptures for you: Luke 2:6-7: "While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger."

And then that marvelous passage from the Gospel of John, the first chapter: "In the beginning was the Word. And the word was with God. And the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made."

How many things? All. Only the stuff we can see? No. All things in Him, all things were made.

"Without Him, nothing was made that has been made. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

That ought to send shivers down your spine. That's the incarnation. That's what we mean by incarnation. The coming of Christ taking on human flesh. Say it with me. Incarnation.

So, we have Creation. Say it with me. Creation, Fall, Incarnation.

And now Crucifixion. Jesus was nailed to the cross of his own creation. You ever think about that? Nothing was created that was not created in Him. Jesus is nailed to the cross of his own creation. He takes into his own body and into his divine being— perfectly, fully God, fully man, at the same time, though, without sin— he takes into his own body all the suffering and the sin and the whole story of creation—all of it. Jesus is suspended between heaven and earth. You ever think about that? And his arms stretched out in love on the hard wood of the cross, embraces and redeems everything.

Oh, can I get an amen up in here this morning? Are you listening?

Here's a Bible verse for you: John 19:28-30. "Later, knowing that everything had now been finished and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, I am thirsty.

"And a jar of wine vinegar was there. So they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. And when he had received the drink, Jesus said, it is finished.

“And with that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

That's the Crucifixion. Say it with me, Crucifixion.

So, let's go from the beginning. Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Crucifixion.

Now, Resurrection. Sometimes some Christians' retelling of God's story ends with resurrection. But beloved, we're not all the way through the seven yet, because there's more to the story.

Resurrection. Now, Jesus experienced and then destroyed death, not only for you and not only for Me. But for all of the created order.

And his work on the cross begins to upright that upside down world that happened in the Fall. So, the resurrection is a new “in the beginning.” By rising from the dead, listen closely, by rising from the dead, Jesus invites all of humanity to a restored relationship with God. Wow. And as if that were not enough, heaven and earth, the heavens and the earth, all of creation are reconciled. Glory to God.

Here's a verse or two for you: Matthew 28: “After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. And the angel said to the women, do not be afraid, for I know that you were looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen just as he said, come and see the place where he lay.”

You see, if you make salvation's story all about you, then Jesus did that for you and that's the end of the story. Now, that's true: He did do that for you, thanks be to God. Don't want to minimize that. But it's not the fullness of the story, because he did that for the whole of the created order, even though that event happened on the earth.

So, Resurrection. Let's do all of them. Creation, Fall, incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and now Ascension.

It's one of those doctrines that sometimes are given short shrift by Christians. In the faith tradition I grew up with, it was never talked about. It was kind of a curious footnote to Jesus' earthly ministry. We didn't think about it very much.

Forty days after the resurrection, our victorious Christ, our Christus Victor, bodily ascended into heaven, and evil and all the powers and principalities—how many of them? All—the powers and principalities are defeated and they are in chains. And the whole host of the heavens greets Jesus on his return.

It's not the last thing that happens on earth and so therefore God's story ends. No, it's the beginning of a new ministry, where Jesus is our eternal liturgist, who is ever at the right hand of the Father interceding, the perfect sacrifice, the perfect priest, the last and ultimate Adam, who is there even now, and all powers are subject to Him. How many? All.



Here's some Bible verses for you: Isaiah 66. I love this. "This is what the Lord says heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you would build for me? Where is my resting place? Has not my hand made all these things? And so they came into being."

Colossians 2: "God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us. He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross, and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

And Hebrews 4: "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has 'gone through the heavens,' (reads the original Greek), who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."

That'd be a great verse for the whole series. That's Ascension. Say it with me. Ascension.

Let's do the whole thing. Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension.

And now the Re-creation. There's a great recapitulation. There is a great re-creation that started when Jesus rose from the dead. Because we are in the kingdom already, in Christ. All of creation has been restored.

One day there's going to be a new heavens and a new earth. A real, honest to goodness heavens and earth. The grass is going to be crunchy, the mountains are going to be rocky. It's real. It's tangible stuff. It's going to be a new and restored Eden ideal, a temple not made by human hands.

And beloved, one day we're going to have new bodies. Real, honest to goodness bodies. How do I know this? Because Scripture says that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Amen.

Revelation 21 says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new."

So, that's Re-creation. Say it with me. Re-creation.

And let's do the whole thing. Creation, Fall, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Re-creation.

That's God's story. That's the big story. That's the narration. That's the storyline that makes the most sense. It's the one that we'd better know when the world asks big questions and makes assumptions.

I mentioned H.G. Wells earlier. Here's a quote from his 1897 novel, "War of the Worlds," that I was talking about. It tells a story about aliens looking upon the earth and plotting an invasion:

*Yet across the gulf of space, alien minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this Earth with envious eyes and slowly and surely drew their plans against us.*

Thank God that his story is the only one that makes sense of life in the universe and everything. Who's going to narrate the universe? Let's pray:

*Father, help us to be found faithful and to be ready with your story. Creation, fall, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, recreation. Help us be ready to tell it and know what we believe, especially when asked big questions or confronted with big assumptions.*

*We ask your blessings and give you thanks. In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*