

Creation

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[0 : 00] Well, again, let me welcome you, especially those of you who are visiting. We started a couple of weeks ago a series basically asking, exploring some of the ultimate questions of life, questions that everybody wonders about regardless of what they believe, questions to which our beliefs speak, questions like where did all of this come from?

Who are we? Why are we here? What are we here for? How do we make sense of our lives? How do we make sense of our work, our culture, our society?

How do we understand things like gender or sexuality or marriage? How do we make sense of all of this? And the Bible says if we want to understand these things, that the first thing we have to do is to go back to the beginning.

We have to go back to the book of Genesis, and specifically the opening chapters of Genesis. The first 11 chapters of Genesis really lay the foundation for everything else, and particularly the first three chapters.

And so this week we're continuing our study in this book, looking at the opening chapters, and we're focusing on Genesis chapter 1, verse 1 through verse 25, and we're seeking to understand the world as a whole, creation as a whole.

[1 : 28] This passage is very familiar to a lot of people, primarily because of the debates that are inspired around it. You hear about the creation story in Genesis 1, and you immediately think of the debate, or really the debate is a nice way to put it, the battle that is perceived to exist between faith and science.

And you think of Ken Ham and the evolution debate, and we think of this tension that exists. As we said last week, whenever we want to interpret the Bible, not just this, but any place in the Bible, we have to be able to understand the mindset of the people who wrote it, and the people to whom it was written originally.

In other words, we have to be able to read ancient texts, not through modern eyes, but through ancient eyes. We have to read ancient texts through ancient eyes.

Genesis, along with all of the other ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation, when it was written, the prevailing questions and concerns in people's minds had nothing to do with how things came to be.

This was not written as a scientific document. It was not written to explain the processes of creation. It was written to answer the far deeper and more fundamental question of why.

[2 : 57] Why? Not how was all of this made, but for what was all of this made? So it's not a science textbook. It's poetry.

It's poetry. And you can tell by the strophes, the repetition, the parallelism, all of these structures here are poetic structures. So it was written to explain the question of why.

And so with that lens, putting that lens on, we're going to look at verses 1 through 25, which are meant to help us understand the world we live in and the God who made it. And specifically, it's going to show us three things about this world.

That God conceived it in love. That God created it by His word. And that God called it good. He conceived it in love.

He created it by His word. And He called it good. Let's pray for God's help. Our Father in heaven, we do, as we've, in our song and in our prayer, acknowledge that we need Your word to lead us to lighten our path, to illuminate our way, to give us life that we cannot find here, that we can only find in You.

[4 : 15] That Lord, we pray these things would happen in us as we open Your word together. And we ask this in Your Son's name. Amen. So the first thing we see in the opening verses of Genesis 1

is this, that God conceived this world in love.

It was conceived in love. If you begin reading, it says in verse 1, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So we have God. There's God.

The 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 water. So we have God, and then we have the Spirit of God. And the Spirit of God is hovering, and this is a beautiful Hebrew word that conveys the image of a mother bird hovering over her young. And so it's an incredibly wonderful, beautiful image, kind of a familial image of care and parental love.

The Spirit of God is hovering over the face of the waters. Verse 3, And God said, Let there be light. And there was light. So we see, unlike other creation myths and stories and accounts, God speaks creation into being.

[5 : 29] So you have the Word of God, and when you look at places like John chapter 1 or Colossians chapter 1, we see that Jesus is this Word, as Colossians says, through whom all things were made.

So here in the opening verses, we have at the very beginning of the Bible, really before anything has been brought into being, we have a creator, this God who is in his very nature, tri-personal. Three persons. One God, but three persons. You have a Father, the God, and then you have the Spirit of God, and then you have the Word of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And you have this tri-personal being that shows us that before anything existed, everything that is, everything that is in this world, including us, was conceived of or thought up in the context of a loving interpersonal relationship.

That's astounding. It's amazing. It's amazing when you think that that means that love itself, so the kind of love that exists between persons, was never created.

[6 : 43] Unlike virtually everything else, love has always been, has always been, an eternal relationship of love.

You know, it's radically different from the other ancient Near Eastern creation accounts. Right? A common example that you may be familiar with is the Babylonian creation story, Enuma Elish. And if you know anything about the plot of that story, this is the creation account. Guess what happens? There's a lot of drama that ensues, but the real climax of the story is Marduk kills his great, great, great grandmother, Tiamat, who happens to be a dragon.

And then he fillets her like a fish. And then he takes half of her corpse and makes the sky out of it. Okay? Mom, Dad, why is the sky so beautiful at night?

Well, it's Tiamat's rotting corpse. That's really what you're looking at. So, you look at that account, you look at these other accounts, there's violence, there's divine power struggles, there's conquest, there's sometimes rape and sexual assault, there's all kinds of things, you know, divine copulation, and God's playing tricks on each other, and betraying each other, and killing their parents.

[7 : 52] And then you look at this story. An eternal interpersonal relationship of perfect love. And that's the context from which all of this sprang into being.

So what's the implication of this for us? The implication is this. The primary thing, the primary thing, in life, the primary principle, is interpersonal relationships.

Relationships of love. Most of us, if we're honest, most of us, if we look at our own lives, we know that relationships matter in theory.

And most of us have a few people that we're close to, friends and family that we're close to, but most of us, even though we know relationships matter, they really tend to take a backseat to other things.

I mean, in a place like D.C., people don't come here for relationships. You come here for a job, you come here for an internship, you come here for school, you come here to get credentialed in some way, you come here to get a foot in the door to a career that will probably lead you elsewhere.

[9 : 01] I know very few people that come here for relationship. I know more and more of you are staying because of relationships. Because we're beginning to see and to realize that when we live a kind of life where relationships are the things we fit in around the margins, you know, I have my job, that's central, I have my career, I have my education, those are central, they get the best of me, and then whatever leftover time and energy I have, I'm kind of fitting relationships in when and where I can, right?

Relationships tend to be the things we fit in. This is true for me. This is autobiographical, right? But here's the thing. If love, if interpersonal love is the only thing here that has always been because it was in God, in God's very nature, and if that is the world in which or the context in which all of this was conceived of and a loving interpersonal relationship, then that is the primary thing.

We talked a couple of weeks ago about because God created the heavens and the earth, we know that there's a purpose, there's a design, there's a way that it's meant to function. And guess what? At the very center of that way is relationship.

It's relationship. We're designed, the world is made to revolve around relationship, relationship that exists between us and then between us and God.

It's central. So if we want to live in a way that reflects the kind of flow, the fabric, the grain, the texture of ultimate reality, if we want to be radically countercultural, what would it look like to fit our job and our school and our credentialing around relationships?

[10:48] What would it look like to make decisions about where we live and where we move or whether we move based primarily on the place where we're going to have the richest relationships with one another and with God?

And that was the central priority. Not convenience. Not pleasure. Not necessarily success or career advancement. Not free parking.

Not easily accessible grocery stores. Not safer streets. But what if we made it about relationship? If that was the primary thing? So this is the first thing we see about creation.

God conceives this world in love and that tells us that loving relationships are the most important thing there is. And then as we move on in the text, we see the next thing. God conceived this world in love.

He created it by His word. He created it by His word. Verse 2 says that the world was without form and void. The Hebrew there is *tohu wabohu* or *tohu wabohu*.

[11:49] In short, this conveys the idea of chaos. It's not nothing. There's something but that something is chaos. It's undifferentiated matter.

It's useless, functionless, purposeless stuff. And then what does God do? God speaks. God speaks. Let there be light.

And then what does His word do to the chaos? His word brings order to the chaos. What does His word do to the darkness? It brings light to the darkness. So order to chaos, light to darkness.

He takes this chaos and He begins to do what with it? He begins to differentiate. Chaotic matter, He separates and differentiates and begins to assign roles and functions to things.

And so in day one, we see God separating and establishing the rhythm of day and night. This will be day and this will be night. And night is not day and day is not night. They're separate. What's God doing?

[12:51] A rhythm of day and night. This is the creation of time. Time. You wonder why there's evening and then morning? It's kind of weird. Why would there not be morning and then evening on the first day?

There's evening and then morning. It's because when God, before God did this, there was no day. There was no morning. And God does this act of creation and the first thing to come in this rhythm is evening. And then morning.

He's establishing time. Day two. God separates the waters above from the waters below. In the ancient Near East, people believed that there was a storehouse of water above the sky.

And that's where rain came from. And the object is not to correct the science. As we said, it's to answer the deeper question of why. It's theology. So God, it says God separates the waters above from the waters below with an expanse.

And what will that expanse do? It will regulate the rain and the wind. It will regulate the clear sky and the clouds. What is God doing? He's creating weather. Day one, time.

[13:53] Day two, weather. Climate. Day three, God separates land from water and then sets up the processes by which that land will produce plants, which then produce seeds, which then produce more plants.

What's he doing? Agriculture. Agriculture. Time. Weather. Agriculture. And these are the pillars of society. And they're also the three things that to this day with all of our great technology we still can't control.

Days four, five, and six, God populates these various domains. He populates the day and the night with the sun and the moon and the stars to do what? To help appoint and measure the seasons and the years.

Time, right? He fills the sky with birds and the sea with fish and the land with animals and then finally humans. And what we see with all this is this, is that God's word is bringing order to chaos and that makes it possible for life to flourish.

God's word orders the chaos and as a result life can exist and life can flourish. So what is the implication for us? God's word has power and it can have this same power in our lives.

[15:16] The same power. If you notice throughout Genesis chapter one there's this poetic pattern and normally when there's a pattern it means it's something to be emphasized and one of the patterns in Genesis one is this, and God said and it was so.

And God said and it was so. And God said and it was so. It recurs every single day. And if we go forward into the New Testament we see this isn't the only place that we see this kind of language. Where else do we see it? When Jesus came the first thing that people noticed about him was what? We heard it in Luke chapter four. The authority of his word.

We've never heard speaking like this. He speaks with authority. He says to the demon come out and the demon comes out. He says to the storm be still and the storm stills. He says to the man come out of the tomb and the man rises and comes out of his tomb.

He says take up your mat and walk and the man takes up his mat and walk. It's the same authority. It's the same word. Here's the thing. When we put our lives under that word in other words when we put our lives under the authority when we allow that word to speak to us in that way when we put our lives under scripture when we submit ourselves to this power we are submitting ourselves to the very same creative power that brought this world into existence.

[16:40] The same creative power. Is Jesus the word or is scripture the word? Yes. This is why this is why Jesus in John 14 says if anyone loves me he will obey my word.

Word. They're one and the same. What we're seeing here is that just as God created the world he is recreating it now and he does that through the word.

Jesus and scripture. The psalm we read earlier Psalm 119 verse 25 it's just kind of been floating around in my brain in my heart for the last several weeks it's just really stuck with me lately verse 25 says my soul clings to the dust give me life according to your word.

It's a confession and then a petition my soul clings to the dust that's the confession that's the truth about me my soul clings to the dust. What does that mean? Here's the cruel joke played on human beings through the fall.

The things that I most desire are the things that will destroy and bring chaos and darkness into my life. the things that will bring me life are the things that I least desire.

[18:01] Right? Nobody who is married is naturally monogamously faithful to their spouse. That doesn't come we're not naturally that's not our our 100% of the time desire.

We don't desire that all of the time. Every marriage everybody who is in marriage at some point if you're married long enough will have to deal with some form of desire for somebody who's not your spouse. Why?

My soul clings to the dust. Dust in the Bible that's chaos that's decay that's death. My soul clings to that. Right? Generosity doesn't come naturally.

What comes naturally? What's my instinct with my stuff? It's to hoard it and protect it so that I can have more than you. My soul clings to the dust. Forgiveness doesn't come naturally.

Forgiveness brings life and healing and restoration but it's hard it doesn't come naturally. What do I want to do? I want to hold a grudge for 20 years. I don't want to get revenge on you. You hurt me I want to get you back.

[19:00] That's what comes naturally. Why? My soul clings to the dust. People say well you know some people like obviously pastors must love to read the Bible. I hate to read the Bible. No. Nobody likes to read the Bible. You want to know why?

Nobody likes to read the Bible. Naturally. Why? Your soul clings to the dust. Your soul clings to everybody loved waking up and reading the Bible and understanding and applying it you wouldn't need me.

We wouldn't need any of this. The only way the soul must understand something that we need to understand. My soul clings to the dust. The only way out of that the only way to recapture my heart

and recapture my affections and recalibrate my desires is through the word.

I've got to come under the creative recreative power of that word. I've got to let that recreate me from the inside out so that I will desire the things of life and not the dust and chaos of death.

Genesis 1 shows us the power of God's word to order the world. Won't you let it order your life? Won't you let it order your priorities?

[20 : 12] Won't you let it order your values? Your commitments? Genesis 1 shows us that God's word makes it possible for life to flourish. Let it bring flourishing life to you.

How? You have to put yourself under its creative authority. So God conceived this world in love. He created this world by his word.

Two things that we see. And then the third thing we see is this that God looked at all of this and he called it good. He called it good. And I love this.

It says a little bit later, God saw everything that he had made and behold, it was very good. You've got to realize the implications of this. You know, Eastern religions tend to think that the material world is an illusion.

Right? The whole purpose of transcendental meditation, Buddhist meditation and discipline is to transcend the illusion of the material. Right? Those of you who practice yoga and love yoga, the whole context of the development of yoga is to help you transcend the illusion of the material world to escape.

[21 : 20] The Greeks and the Romans tend to think that the material world is real but it's evil. It's evil and there's an idealizing of the spiritual and the hope is to reject, to reject the evil material world and to escape to the spiritual.

That sounds a lot like the way a lot of Christians talk but that's not what the Bible says about the material world. A lot of Christians think that way. You know that song I'll Fly Away?

That's not Christianity. It's a great song but it doesn't reflect the truth of what God's word says about this world. Christianity is the only religion there is as far as I know that says this world, this material world right here is good.

It's good. Right? Though it's fallen, though it's broken, though it's twisted, under all of that it was fundamentally good. Implications.

What does this mean? Christians should throw the best parties. Christians should throw the best parties. I'm not even kidding.

[22 : 33] The doctrine of creation makes it possible for us to have an extraordinarily balanced relationship with the material world. The balance is this.

We can thoroughly enjoy it without worshipping it. We can enjoy it without worshipping it. On the one hand, we know that this world, this creation story tells us, this world was meant to be enjoyed. It was meant to be relished. It was meant to be celebrated. I mean, it's no coincidence that Jesus loves a good party. He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard because he always went to these parties.

And I don't think he was sitting in their corner with his, you know, kind of, oh, you go ahead. I don't think he was doing that. I think he was enjoying good food and good drink and good conversation over the table.

He was enjoying himself. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, right? It's no coincidence that he put at the very center of our relationship with him the symbol, the sacrament of the meal that we share.

[23 : 37] He could have picked anything, but he picked a meal. Bread and wine shared between friends. It's no coincidence that the image that he uses to tell us what the new creation will be like is a great feast the likes of which we've never seen, the likes of which we can't even imagine.

Rich food and landscapes and sunsets and symphonies and the smell of rain on hot pavement and fall breezes and all of that is meant to be enjoyed, it's meant to be celebrated, it's meant to be relished.

So Christians should be great celebrators of creation. We should love beauty, we should love art, we should love music, we should love good food and good drink, we should love all of these things. We should love them and celebrate them more than anyone else.

You know this concept, the joie de vivre, Christians should exude a joy of life. On the other hand, while this world was made to be enjoyed, it was not made to be worshipped.

Unlike many other religions, God is separate from his creation. The sky, the stars, the sun and the moon, they're not gods, they're things that God made.

[24 : 47] The animals are not divine, the trees are not divine, the ocean is not a divine being. That's what Tiamat was, the god of the ocean. God is none of these things, God made all of these things, God is thoroughly, utterly, completely separate and holy, which is what holy means, from his creation.

And what that tells us is that while we should enjoy creation, we should never worship creation. We should never make it our God. Romans 1 says that's what's wrong with us. Romans 1 says it's because we started worshipping the created things rather than the creator that has twisted our hearts.

So to be made right with God through Jesus is to have our hearts made right, to worship the creator and not any created thing. We're designed to love and worship God above all else.

That's what we need to flourish. So you see this balance, this balance that we're called to. We're neither ascetics, living in a cave somewhere, rejecting everything.

We're not called to be ascetics. We're not called to be hedonists. We should enjoy, enjoy the world with the, more than the hedonists because we have the inner detachment of the ascetics.

[26 : 07] You see? It's precisely because we don't need it, because it isn't the ultimate thing because God is and because we know if we have God we have everything. It's precisely because we don't need it that we are liberated to enjoy it more than people who do need it.

All of this language about, you know, the Bible says don't be worldly and people say well not being worldly means all these things, you know, all the things that I can and can't do and all that.

No. What worldliness is, what the warning there is, is not telling us to avoid pleasure in this life.

Worldliness is thinking that the pleasure in this life is the only thing there is.

That's what worldliness is. It's forgetting that this is just a shadow of what will be in a consummated kingdom. It's just a foretaste. It's just the tiniest glimmer.

See, pleasure and joy and desire, those are things that are meant to point us to God and forgetting that there's anything out there and thinking that this is it. That's worldliness. There's a great illustration of this in, I just re-read the Space Trilogy, C.S. Lewis' Space Trilogy, and the second book is called Perlandra and it's about, and I won't spoil the plot for you if you haven't read it, but it's about Ransom.

[27 : 26] His name is Ransom, Dr. Ransom, and he travels to a world that has not yet gone through the fall. So you see a world as it would be before the fall and you see things like desire and pleasure operating there as they would without sin, without the fall.

And one of my favorite parts is when Ransom has finally climbed up onto the shore and he's hungry and he finds a gourd and he takes this gourd and he's not sure if he can eat it and he's kind of feeling around and his finger pokes through and kind of makes this opening and he sits there staring at it wondering if he should sample it.

He's on a completely alien world. He's understandably cautious and he's looking at it and it says this, after a moment's hesitation, he put the little aperture to his lips.

He had meant to extract the smallest experimental sip but the first taste put his caution all to flight. It was, of course, a taste just as his thirst and hunger had been thirst and hunger but then it was so different from every other taste that it seemed mere pedantry to call it a taste at all.

It was like the discovery of a totally new genus of pleasures, something unheard of among men out of all reckoning, beyond all covenant. For one draft of this on earth, wars would be fought and nations betrayed.

[28 : 45] And then it says, as he let the empty gourd fall from his hand and was about to pluck a second one, it came into his head that he was now neither hungry nor thirsty.

Perfectly satisfied. And yet, to repeat a pleasure so intense and almost so spiritual seemed an obvious thing to do.

His reason, or what we commonly take to be reason on our own world, was all in favor of tasting this miracle again. But for whatever cause, it appeared to him better not to taste again.

Perhaps the experience had been so complete that repetition would be a vulgarity, like asking to hear the same symphony twice in a day. And then here's the, it concludes with this.

It says, after this experience, he wondered how often in his life on earth he had reiterated pleasures not through desire but in the teeth of desire. In the teeth of desire.

[29 : 53] See, this is what's possible when our relationship with God is righted. And we love God, we come through his power to love him more than anything he's made, even a nearly spiritual experience of drinking from a gourd.

We can experience pleasure, we can experience desire to their fullest of what they were meant to be without being caught in the teeth of desire.

See, that's the paradox. You have to be free from it to be able to fully enjoy it. But the more you come to need it, the less you can enjoy it because you're enslaved by it.

So when our hearts are put right and when we realize that we're made to love the creator and not the created thing, we can enjoy all created things. We can enjoy all of them.

And we can enjoy them through our desire which was made for these things because we're not caught in the teeth of them. We're not caught in the teeth of our own desire because we recognize that as Augustine said, ultimately our hearts will be restless until they find their rest, their peace, their fulfillment in the creator God.

[31 : 07] Right? So as we look at these verses, we see three amazing things about this world. Amazing things about this world that God conceived this world in love, that love was always there, that before anything was made, these three persons were in their love, in their other glorifying, self-sacrificing, other oriented love that they shared with one another.

They dreamed up together. They dreamed up the idea of you and me and all of this. God conceived the world in love.

He created it by His word, His powerful word, and then He called it good. And as we'll see in the coming weeks, as we said, the world is fallen as we are fallen and things are not the way they're supposed to be.

But the good news is this. Here's the good news. That the same love that moved God to create all of this, that same love has moved God to rescue it and to restore it.

That the same word that created all of this and brought it into being, that same word has now become flesh, has come among us, and has given of life to rescue us.

[32 : 17] And that because of these things, because of this love, and because of the word become flesh, we know that just as God once looked at all of this and said, this is very good, pronounced His pleasure in what He had made in His workmanship.

So through Jesus Christ, God looks at each one of us and beholds His workmanship and says, this is very good. This is very good.

Let's pray. Our Father, we do thank You for Your Word and thank You for showing us these deep realities of ourselves and the world that we live in and what they show us about You.

We thank You for the eternity and the beauty and the primacy of love. We pray that You would bless our relationships. In particular, we pray for those without relationships, who lack friends, who are lonely or don't have family.

We pray for all of those that through Your power and through this community they would find a family, they would find friends. We pray that You, as You say in Your Psalms, that You are the God who sets the lonely in families.

[33 : 34] We pray that that would happen through this community. Lord, we pray that Your Word would have power in this place, that it would be recreating us, as we submit to it.

And Lord, we pray finally that we would have such an awareness of the goodness of what You've made, that we would be a celebratory people. Lord, that there would be a joy and a richness to our life together.

And we pray that this would not distract us from You, but that it would be one of the ways that we worship You. And we pray this in Your Son's holy name. Amen. Amen.