

Genesis 1:3–31

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 January 2021

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 1, verses 3 through 31. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And there was evening, and there was morning the first day. And God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.

And God made the expanse, and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse heaven, and there was evening, and there was morning the second day.

And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was so. God called the dry land earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called seas.

And God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit, in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And it was so.

[1 : 08] The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit, in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

And there was evening, and there was morning the third day. And God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years.

And let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to give light upon the earth. And it was so.

And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars.

And God set them in the expanse of the heavens, to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

And there was evening, and there was morning the fourth day. And God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth, across the expanse of the heavens.

[2 : 08] So God created the great sea creatures, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters and the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth. And there was evening, and there was morning the fifth day.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures, according to their kinds, livestock, and creeping things, and beasts of the earth, according to their kinds. And it was so.

And God made the beasts of the earth, according to their kinds, and the livestock, according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground, according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[3 : 10] So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the

breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.

And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Amen. By the end of the second verse in Genesis, we understood that God, who created all things, intended to be celebrated by all people.

And if that truth, which was put forward last week from the introductory words of Genesis, fell fully upon us, at least in ways that the writer intended for us, you would have arrived here this morning waiting for the reading of God's word in ways that made you dance with mental energy.

[5 : 17] It would have been something like the excitement that a young child feels when they're sitting on the very edge of their seat as a spellbinding story is taking place.

Because when we last left Genesis, the Holy Spirit was said to be hovering over this earth, which was as of yet formless and void, without form and yet unfilled.

And the hovering was the word used elsewhere in scripture of a bird fluttering. That by the end of verse 2, the reader was to consider that God, like a hummingbird, is now fluttering over an unformed, unfilled creation with divine, creative intention.

He is fixed in place. His wings are stirring and our hearts ought to have almost been beating with a desire to know the reasons for which he is to be celebrated by all people.

Whether or not you arrived in that state today, I do not know. But as we together see the fullness of his glory, I want you to know that the effect, the soul-soaking effect of Genesis 1 is that the reader would become a worshiper.

[7 : 11] That's the intention. That you and I would read this account and be filled with awe at the God who creates all things and that it ought to create within us a willingness to receive praise from us.

This is exactly what happens. This word on creation is meant to make worshipers of every creature. That's its intent.

That this account is to somehow stir our heart, not merely the questioning of our minds.

When you turn to the last book in the scriptures, Revelation, and find yourself in John's vision of chapter 4, where he's drawn up into heaven, and he sees the four creatures that are before the throne, eternally giving praise to him.

He likewise says that he sees 24 elders falling down before the throne, saying, Worthy art thou to receive glory and honor and praise, for thou hast created all things.

[8 : 25] That presently in heaven, there are worshipers of God because he is the creator of all things. And that's what I hope will happen to our own hearts this morning, that we would catch up, as it were, to the writer's intention.

Well, for what reasons do we, does this text, cause us to celebrate God at creation?

First of all, you're going to see in this text God's goodness toward us. And secondly, you're going to see the glory of God, which he graciously shares with us.

And both his goodness and his glory ought to evoke giving of our lives to Christ.

There's not a listener to this sermon today that ought not to give their lives to knowing God through the face of his Son. So let's take a look.

[9 : 32] The goodness of God in creation, a cause for celebration. At one level, it's easy for us as readers to get lost in the minutia of this text.

I don't know if your own mind was triggered four or five times in the course of Bandon's reading. It's easy for us to take this text line by line, to almost interrupt it with the questions that are in our mind, and it can derail us from seeing the chapter as a whole.

By way of analogy, I want you to think of Genesis chapter 1 as one of the rare kinds of literature that actually presents itself to the reader the way an explosive, colorfully painted oil on enlarged canvas looks to an observer.

Genesis 1 might almost be better looked at than line by line dissected.

It wants to be taken in that way. So I want you to take a step back from the minutia. I want you to see the majestic nature of the writing. I want you to observe it as though you are in an art gallery looking at an explosive painting on an exalted canvas.

[11 : 00] And that requires some distance. And so as we step back to see the literary structure, we encounter God's goodness.

From a distance, we can make out first, I want to say, six days. Six days. As a whole, we're looking at a creation account that reveals to me six days.

And they each have a reoccurring literary structural formula. They each tell me that God said. They each repeat that it was so, that whatever he said is so.

They then indicate that God calls things. And then you have this repetition that closes evening and morning a particular day.

Now, these days, while they may or may not be equivalent to our 24-hour days, are nevertheless the view of which we see the created order in this text.

[12:09] Whether they are hours, 24 in number like our own, or ages, or perhaps they're to be taken necessarily so analogically, as though God is looking for language to approximate what he does at creation to our own work and its week, I'm not going to delve into today.

There will be more next week as we look at the seventh day to consider its analogical framework for the first readers as a whole and the form of a work week and a day of rest.

But nevertheless, here it is. There are six days. But when you pull up even further before your own questions interpret or run over the text, it's not just six days.

You're looking at a majestic account of creation that's really divided into two halves. Did you see the halves as they were given? Verses 3 through 13, days 1 through 3, you see the creation of forms. And then in verses 14 through 31, that which was formed in day 1, 2, and 3 is filled in days 4, 5, and 6.

[13:39] And I can't help but think it is intentionally connected to what we saw last week. Verse 2, the earth was without form and void.

That the literary structure of the account is to have you consider the creative activity of God in making the universe by bringing order to what was first created by him without form and bringing rulers over that order by that which is then filling them and emerging with life within them.

There's a correspondence to verses 3 to 31 right out of verse 2. The earth was without form and void. Verses 3 to 13, and God brought form.

Verses 14 through the end of the chapter, and those forms which he created, he filled. You'll even see a correspondence between the two halves.

On day 1, he's creating light and separating light from darkness. And it corresponds to day 4, where you have that which fills that, fills it out indeed, which is the creation of the sun and the moon.

[15:00] Light, but now the sun and the moon. Day 2, you have this expansive separation of waters. And indeed, you begin to see the waters and all of it separating things in day 5.

Day 3, you have the vegetation beginning to emerge and the created order. And in day 6, you actually see the things which rule all over God's created order.

There's a correspondence between them. In other words, the writer intentionally, in a literary way, is organizing the material for you to step back and see that the God who created all things has done so in ways that find a fullness around them and a simplicity for them.

In fact, if you look at days 3 and 6, it's the only corresponding days where there's almost a double creation in play. Two things emerge in days 3 and day 6.

There's another interesting facet about what's happening in the creation story that I was reminded of this week by going back and reading a lecture by Leo Strauss, a 20th century figure of importance at the University of Chicago, a philosopher whose impact really is still stirring the schools of social thought and political theory.

[16:36] But Leo Strauss once gave a lecture at the University of Chicago in 1957 on this very chapter. And one of the things that he noticed, which I feel often gets overlooked, is the highlighted nature of separation within the act of creation.

You know, there are seven times where the word separated appears. You can see it early in verse 2, God saw the light was good and he separated light from darkness.

Or verse 7, the expanse then is separated, the waters from above and below. Or you'll see it again in the seed of verse 11 through the word yielding.

It is actually what he creates separates itself. And then other things are able to be created from it.

You'll see it in verse 18, again, where the lights are separating light from darkness.

You'll see it even in the creation of man, who is separated then immediately into what it is to be male and female. What does Strauss make of this?

[17 : 48] It's simply this, that God did not just create all things, but the writer wants you to see that when God created all things, he intended for them to separate, not only for the purpose of reproducing of species, but the replenishing of his creation.

This is why you ought to give praise and glory to God. He didn't just create all things. He created a universe, a world, creatures, plant life, and human beings that replenish within itself all the things that were created.

It is a beautiful thing to consider. The replenishing of his creation. I was thinking this morning early while it was snowing and yet still dark looking out my kitchen window.

Some years ago, we tore up a lot of concrete in the back, and we created a little more space back to the soil where we could grow things. And we moved a couple things of hosta that were kind of lazily placed on another part of the yard into that so that we could begin to fill that which was without form.

It was only a few years where that hosta began to emerge in the spring and fill itself and then literally replenish itself to the point where we needed to take it in halves and then place it elsewhere.

[19 : 24] So now, if you arrive at our home, you'll find hosta not only in that space, but you'll find hosta on the side of the building, and you'll find hosta on the front by the sidewalk.

And the reason is that very created vegetation of the Lord has within it the capability not only to emerge every year, but to replenish itself in multiplying, growing ways.

No wonder, as we'll see in a few weeks, when God put man in the garden, he said he had to work it because one of the things that's happening is God's created order is ever expanding in ways that are glorious and require attention.

And it ought to require a heart that grows in praise. Can you create like this?

Can you make something that has the capability within it to continue making itself with all of this glory? If you can, in some manufactured way, can you do it simply by the power of your word?

[20 : 32] And God said, and it was so. Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art.

When through the woods and forest glades I wander and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees, when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze, then sings my soul.

The created order is a reflection of God's goodness. In fact, don't miss it. That is exactly the way this chapter is moving you to.

His goodness is not only there by stepping back to seeing the six days and all of their particularity. It's not only by understanding that there are two halves with corresponding beauty where it creates itself.

It is actually stated in a literary way so that the reader will not miss it. And all of this was good. Seven times in the fullness of the created account.

[21 : 54] Verse 3, and God saw that the light was good. Verse 9, he called the seas and God saw that it was good.

When the trees and their fruit-bearing seeds were in place, each according to their kind. Verse 12, God saw that it was good. When the stars were hung and the great lights were in place, the sun and the moon that separate the night from the darkness, God saw, verse 18, that it was good.

And in verse 21, when the great sea creatures began to swarm through the waters, all according to their kind, and the winged creatures took flight above, it says God saw that it was good.

When everything was there, the beasts of the field, verse 25, it was good. And at the close of the sixth day, the literary focus that he wants you to grab through the creation account concerns the goodness of all creation and therefore the goodness of God.

Verse 31, and God saw everything that he has made, and behold, it was very good. That Holy Spirit hovering at creation with the intention to let us know that God intends to be celebrated is such because he is good.

[23 : 29] And everything that proceeds from his word is good. I was thinking about this.

In one sense, it's dizzying for me. Genesis 1 is telescoping into this movement.

I was thinking of recently getting up twice over the winter holiday break, Christmas holiday break, and twice watching the sunrise.

And one day, Lisa and I stood there, and we watched it rise. And there weren't any clouds. And you could see the light before it was light.

And then the sun began to emerge. And the speed with which it began to run its course was overwhelming and glorious. And the entire sky just burst forth with the glories of God.

[24 : 35] And then on a second day, sitting and waiting and looking and watching for the sun to rise till finally it began to protrude from the horizon under the cover of clouds.

And yet the rays finding their way already through. And my own heart began to praise God for he rules the created order day by day.

And that is exactly what is to happen here. We are to worship him. God's goodness is in creation. It is a cause for celebration.

God's goodness is in creation. God's goodness is in creation. The account is to make worshipers. And oh, how tragically, how tragic is our condition if we do not honor God or give him thanks for all that he's created?

God says, it ought to affect every walk you take in the winter. As you feel the wind upon your face, as you see the glories of life in the midst of a deadened season, as you see the snows released from heaven, they are all indicators of the Creator who continually to this day is creating and sustaining all things.

[26 : 11] I mean, this chapter is really to almost make us bow in humble adoration. How it is that we've turned it into a chapter of argumentative wrangling is only an indication of how little we understand the author's intent in writing.

I think of Psalm 33, who the psalmist getting it right, when he says, By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.

He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap. He puts the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the earth, watch this, Stand in awe of Him.

Creation creates worshippers of the Creator. In fact, that same psalm echoes the opening words of Milton's call to worship.

It says, That as Psalm 150 calls upon all things in the temple and in the heaven to give praise to God, so too Genesis 1 says that the Creator of the heavens and the earth is uniting all things in praise to Him.

[27 : 54] The goodness of God in creation, a cause for celebration, a cause for you to give your life to a better understanding of the Creator.

For indeed, He has given you the breath you draw. But not only God's goodness in creation, a cause for celebration, but God's glory graciously shared with us at creation, a cause for celebration. In other words, that explosive literary structure of Genesis 1 actually reveals an emphasis, and it relates to His glory.

I want you to take a look. The sixth day is obviously the apex of the account. And I don't want you to feel that I'm pressing you for time, because next week I'm going to return, and we'll do a whole sermon on verses 26 through 31, the creation of man, male, and female, and what that means. But just today I want to bounce into it, because it's impossible to see the creation account without looking at it. The verses allowed to the sixth day are 8 in number out of 31, more than 25%.

[29 : 22] The verses given to the creation of man are 6. Over 20% of the chapter is moving toward what it is to have humanity as the subject of the verses.

Let me put it this way. There's evidence by the emphasis of the text that the creation account is telescoping the reader to the sixth day.

And especially to the creation of humanity. In other words, creation then is not so much here, not that it doesn't have anything to say about these things, but it's not so much bent on a treatise related to cosmology, or astronomy, or geology.

Not even anthropology, but in the sense of spiritual anthropology. There is a divine relational dance in the text that is putting us in the hand of God and moving across the floor with Him face to face. That the God, verse 1, who created the heavens and the earth is moving to, but let me take focus on what He does on the earth, which is moving to, but let me take further telescoping attention on what He does with humanity.

[30 : 53] And this is a glorious wonder. That this is actually indicating to us that while we share in the glory of the rest of creation in that there is a separating and a recreating and a replenishing, there is more than that.

That we share in the glory of God by divine representation. He has done something unique with us that no other part of His creation can say.

It says that we're going to be made in His image, after His likeness. In other words, that we are divine emissaries created to rule over His creation as His vice regents.

Now, if that doesn't put a spring in your step, you've missed the glory of God that He shares with us. It elevates our senses. It sets our heart almost like that of a hummingbird, that the glory that was His and His alone is freely, graciously, kindly bestowed on us.

[32 : 28] The account wants you to see this. This is why the psalmist in Psalms 8 says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him, and yet you've made him a little lower than the angels, and that you've given him rule over all the created order.

He's actually borrowing on this text, and He's exploding in praise because He comes to understand that He, all of us, every man, every woman, every child, created in the likeness and image of God, bearing His imprint, have been given a role on the earth that is unique, unparalleled, above, elevated, the pinnacle of all things already here in the very first chapter.

Now, when you think of it that way, I want to say when it comes to me that way, I think of this divine dance in the created account that God has graciously asked us to join Him on the floor, and He has bestowed upon us domain over all of the created account.

No wonder we care for the environment. No wonder we ought to be caring for the things that make things right in the world. It is in sense right here. It's rooted. We are divine emissaries stewarding what He has given to us, but even more than that, when you consider that the Psalm 8 declaration of what is man, that you are mindful of Him, and the Son of Man, that you care for Him, and that you've given us a role over all things, the writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus was the direct imprint of God's glory, and that as the image of His glory, He was given full dominion, that what happens here for Adam and Eve and what David celebrates upon the human race actually was speeding toward my Lord, your Savior, Jesus Christ, that in Him is the glory of God and all rightful rule, then when you see in Genesis 1 this divine dance between humanity and their Creator, we see in Jesus this embrace of one who is our Savior, and we walk through life with Him face to face, doing all we can to establish His rule in this place.

This is our calling, and it all comes right out of the created order. God's glory in creation, shared with us, is a cause for deep celebration, and I pray then that as you think about this chapter, you will become a worshiper of God and a lover of Jesus.

[35 : 38] Well, let me bring it to a close. Let me say a few things about what it means for us.

Can you envision being part of the first congregation to whom this account was read out loud? I don't know if you've spent much time in the Bible or not, but Genesis is the first part of a five-part work that concludes with Deuteronomy.

And the ascription of the whole rises under the penmanship name of Moses who gives His people the word before He goes into the land. Let me see if you can feel it now, the affection side.

In all likelihood, these words were penned for the community of faith that was standing on the wilderness side of the Jordan on the back side of 40 years of subsistence living where nothing was growing, where getting from morning to evening with enough calories in your body demanded manna or quail bestowed freely by a Creator.

[37 : 06] And they now stand as a church, as an assembly, staring over the banks of Jordan into a promised land.

And they have already been told that it is a land filled with grapes and honey, the size of which we can hardly imagine.

The first readers of this text would have read this account with their hearts palpitating with pleasure because they were not going back to the garden that had been lost long ago.

And your chase and my chase is not back to the garden. For if you and I had been brought back to the garden, in all likelihood, we would have made the same mistakes all over again.

But what God is doing in creation is moving forward from the garden, the place to which we will not return. And He is setting up within the world secure environments where His glory is known and His presence meets.

[38 : 19] And Canaan, for them, replaces the garden. And Christ Himself will replace Canaan. And you and I stand on the other side of the cross longing to exit this wilderness world, not by going back to do it all over again, but by going forward to some eternal rest.

Oh, I'm getting ahead of myself in the next day, next week, day seven. But that's the effect. You ought to read Genesis 1, having seen the goodness of God to you, having now comprehended that the glory of God is shared with you, and that in His Son we have the goodness of God appearing, the glory of God in full, and the desire to be in relationship to you, it ought to just cause your heart to lift.

It ought to cause you to worship. It ought to cause you to speed your way forward to being numbered among the 24 elders who see it all clearly when the veil is pulled back.

They fall before Him and say, worthy are you. Glory to you. Honor to you.

My submission to you. My energy to you. My life to you. For you. For you. Are the creator of all things.

[40 : 07] You intend to be celebrated by all people. For I have tasted of your goodness. I have shared in your glory.

May I now live in worship to you. Our Heavenly Father, as we continue to look at Genesis 1, we pray that this vision of God in all of His glory would so overshadow the contested conversations of our culture.

That it would be a foundation for the way we think. That it would be a realization of the connection we have to Christ.

That it would spur us to a deeper love of you. a deeper care for all that you have done. An elevated concern for our brothers and sisters in this world who do not yet know the purposes for which they were made.

Help our hearts sing. In Christ's name, Amen.