

Rhythm & Meaning

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[0:00] So building on the content that Simon brought to us last week, I want to share three things! in relation to these verses of Genesis. Part one, the Creator. Part two, creation. Part three, oh crap.

And that's intentional so we don't forget that part. Now if you look at most how people typically approach Genesis, we're really typically on a continuum. At one end are those who are more creationists who would say these six days of creation and the seventh day of rest are literally six and seven days of 24 hours and the earth is 10,000 years old and they're sometimes called young earthers. Maybe in the middle it's a combination of those who say there's a descriptive truth in science and a theological truth here in Genesis as God being identified as the creator, originator of life and the earth. And at the other end of the continuum those would say well this is really just a script that is making a stand against the sort of Babylonian thinking of multiple gods at the time and it's like poetry and there's something of the truth of God in it but it really is poetry. We don't decipher that literally in life. And anyone who really writes or comments on Genesis really does tend to state this as being an assertion, a challenge against the view of there being multiple gods. And so rather than multiple gods we have one god, the Creator God. Rather than forces of nature as gods we have the gods we have the gods who created those forces. Rather than humans being slaves of gods at the whim in all these fables and stories we have a god who created humans with intent and with love for relationship. Rather than praying to different gods at different times like when someone dies praying to the god of the underworld or the god of the sun to help you with a harvest there is one god in all seasons who we pray to. And so these verses in many ways I think are an introduction to God's relationship with creation but also an introduction to the creator himself. Now the length of description about the sun and the moon and the stars is really thought to be intended to make a statement challenging really the traditional thinking of the importance of these astral bodies as they're often gods among other gods, often important gods. The Hebrew name for the sun and the moon are left out and the thinking again is it's not wanting to bring confusion to bring clarity that these are merely sources of light not gods. We had a lovely moment when my daughter Isabel was seven and her grandfather was visiting and we were looking out over the Bristol Channel at night and the moonlight was just casting this incredible line of light across towards us. And her grandfather said, isn't the moonlight amazing? So he's actually from Yorkshire, it would have been isn't the moonlight amazing? I'm sorry David for that terrible representation of Yorkshire.

And Isabel piped up and said, Grandad, it's not moonlight, it's the sun's light reflected on the moon. And he said, really? I never knew. And we had this wonderful moment of, oh every day is a school day even if you're 89.

Anyway, back to the script. The stars which were widely worshipped and thought to have a control over human destiny are mentioned last, almost as an afterthought. And I think it's about stating their importance as not as gods but as part of this creation. And in here we see this, they are to give light also reinforces that they have a function and a purpose rather being worshipped bodies in their own way.

[4:30] Now it's Martin Luther, the German pastor and theologian, who says there's little point in arguing about the order of the days in Genesis. Instead, people should consider that Genesis 1 shows just how good and generous God is towards humans. Everything is in place before humans are created.

And Eugene Peterson, who was the church leader who translated the Bible into the message version, wrote this, Genesis is about the primacy of God. Not God on the margins or at weekends, but at the centre and surrounding us.

A foundation that is solid and true to base our lives on. And there's such a narrative that comes through as you read these first words of Genesis about the majesty, the power, the authority of God that was coming through in what Richard shared earlier.

And this is just echoed throughout the Bible. Psalm 19.1. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands. Isaiah 40.28.

The Lord is an everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. Jeremiah 10.12.

[5 : 53] It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom.

Romans 1.20. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power, and divine nature have been clearly seen.

And in John 1.3. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. Eugene continues to write, Create is not confined to what the spirit did.

It's what the spirit does. The spirit of God, who moved over the face of the primordial waters, continues to move. Continues to create in you, in me, in everyone around us today.

And there's a prompting, a challenge there to consider how the life and love and presence of God is with us now, wanting to move within us.

So if we consider Genesis as a portrayal of the creator, Let's just take a moment to consider what that creator, loving God, might want to say to us this morning.

[7 : 19] Lord, we thank you for this clear story of your intent to create an earth that is good, and create an environment and a place for us to live and thrive in relationship with you.

Lord, would you break into our lives in this moment and in this week, that we would build our house and our life on that firm foundation of you as the creator God.

Amen. Part two, creation. When I was 19, I went on a sailing trip with two friends in America.

And I'd never sailed with them before, but they'd heard that I was a sailor, and they said, why don't you come with us? And we have this little 27-foot yacht, and we were setting off out of St.

Petersburg in Tampa Bay, and we were going to sail down to Key West.

Maybe a conversation later would be good. And we set off, and we had all sorts of problems. We got on the boat, and we were provisioning it, and needed a new battery, and as we connected that, I have to say one of the others connected it, the battery melted in on itself and then burnt all the wiring in the boat, so we had to replace that.

[8 : 36] Good start. And so then we're out in the heat, drinking terrible manting dew, which is this big drink in America, in the heat, just dehydrating, trying to sort the boat out.

And then we set off, now delayed because of this work. And then as we set off, and I pushed the boat and jumped on it, and the neighbours came out with their boats just moored to wave us off.

And as they do that, we then crash into their boat and rip it off its moorings, because the guy who was putting the outboard into the water hadn't put it down into the water, so it's just whizzing in the air.

So we apologise, we'll be back, we'll pay for it, we're very sorry. And we set off, now more delayed, and we're trying to catch the tide as it races out of that huge bay. And then as we're trucking along, the guy whose dad owned the boat said, oh, we're going to cut across here now.

I said, no, we can't go there. On the chart, it's very shallow, we'll run aground. He said, it's fine, my dad and I always go this way. I said, well, I wouldn't, but it's your boat.

[9 : 36] And then a minute later, we run aground. With some help of some other boats who eventually managed to tow us off. We're now even later, and now we're just really trying to get going, because we're going to be late travelling out to the bay and getting into the night.

And then a storm builds up in the bay, and then we're starting to feel very seasick, too much mountain dew, too much sun, dehydration. And we are really struggling in the rough seas to manage, to control the boat, and so we don't just have the sails up, and now we've got this outboard running.

And then that stops running, and you have to sort of lean over the engine and hold it in a particular way to make it run. Now we're really being seasick, and it's really rough, and we're delayed.

And so we think, well, we've just got to find the nearest anchorage and drop an anchor and just recover and get through the night. And so we're still being seasick a bit and trying to do this, and at one point I'm leaning over the outboard, holding it, and this other guy, Nick, is saying, where do we need to go to?

I said, those lights there, that's the nylon. We can just anchor off there. Then I'm not really that conscious for a bit. I'm not very well. Thank you. And then when I sort of come to a bit and look up, I say, where have you taken us?

[10:52] He said, I just took us to the lights, you pointed out. I said, no, you haven't. You've taken us out to sea. These are the lights of tankers. So we've got oil tankers, oil tankers lined up waiting to come into the bay, and we are now out in the dark, a tiny yacht in front of the line of oil tankers.

And he did say, oh yeah, I do need my glasses and don't have them with me. Like, okay, that would have been good to know. So then we're thinking, right, what do we do about that? And in that moment as we're using the outboard and the sails, the outboard cuts out.

And we're like, oh. And then we just notice the white of a bow wave on the tanker as it moves towards us and we're in its path. And this is like, this is a no crap moment.

So then we kind of trim the sails and we're trying to get out of the way. Now we're outside the island in the Gulf of Mexico, trying to go up north and get away from this tanker. And it is close.

And we creep out of its way and then it passes us about 50 meters away, which is almost a collision when the tanker's huge as we look up at it. So then we're sailing and we're still being seasick and we're not very well.

[12:05] It's really difficult. And then Christian gets hit by the boom and he's falling into the sea and we just grab him and drag him back in. And then it goes on and on.

And eventually at one point, I'm not very well. And then Nick's steering and he steers us in. I hear these big waves. I'm like, what's that noise? That shouldn't be. The noise of waves. And I come up and he's taking us into the beach, his glasses again.

So we carry on. And eventually by three in the morning, we find somewhere safe to anchor and we stop and drop the sails. It's quiet.

And the next morning, the sun's risen. I'm sleeping on the deck. And I think, come, I just read my prayer book. So I open it for the prayers. I realize, oh, I didn't read it yesterday. And I open it and it says this, the first line.

If the waves are too strong and you can no longer steer your course, trust in me, the captain of your salvation. I'm like, oh, very funny. God, could have done with that yesterday.

[13:09] Thank you very much. But it was an awesome encounter with God's creation and the force of nature that caused us to call out on God.

The other two weren't Christians, but they were praying in the night of that. And as I read these words in Genesis, there's a really strong story of the power and the importance of God's creation in our experience of God, God's design for a place for us to live.

And whenever I'm going to speak or talk, I just always pray, God, what are you saying specifically for us here at Christ Church? And as I went up onto Above Poets Walk on the Hill there to really pray and reflect a couple of times, I really felt strongly God was saying and encouraging us to really pay attention to his creation and therefore experience him through that creation.

This connection of God in and through nature is so evident throughout the Bible. Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leaves me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. Psalm 42, Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls.

[14:34] All your waves and breakers have swept over me. Psalm 121, I lift up my eyes to the mountains. Where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. Psalm 139, Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me.

Your right hand will hold me fast. And we live in a perfect place for experience, this clash between the sea and the land and the sky in Clevedon.

As I stood on the hill above Poets Walk and looking to my left, I could see the sunlight breaking through the clouds over Bristol, sweeping down to the Mendep Hills, and then past Flat Home and Steep Home, the islands, to where you could just see to Exmoor and North Devon.

[15:35] And across to my right, you could see the clouds roiling over Wales as they head towards the Brecon Beacons. And the channel was churning as the tide, as wind over tide.

And as I walked past the Marine Lake, there were just shouts of joy and delight, and people were laughing as they were swimming with the sea topping over. And the island was underwater, and people were trying to stand on it and getting knocked over and thinking, this is hilarious.

If you think about the gigs out there, rowing or the sailing club, navigating the tide, it's such a good location to encounter nature and God's design and God's imprint in all seasons.

Now neuroscientists and biologists comment now on the power of being in nature and how that when we spend time in nature, it reduces the unhelpful cortisol levels when they contribute to inflammation, which is really at the root of so much illness and injury and mental health.

This has been nicknamed green bathing, and I love the sound of that. But I think it's an interesting re-remembering and a re-understanding of God's design of nature and the call to be a part of it.

[16:50] And it represents this need to be present to God's creation and present to God in creation, to be present in the moment to what God might be saying to us.

It's pretty hard to be thinking about many other things as you dip in the sea or in the marine lake or as you walk up on that coastal path. Tyler Statton, who's a church leader and author from the US and a really all-round very nice person, wrote this, And as I work with clients, sometimes we share with them this notion of our relationship to life as a seesaw.

Let's say my elbow is the past and my hand is the future. If we're stuck in a position where we're so drawn to the past, it might be trauma, it might be good times, it might be things that draw us back, it really means we're not so present in the moment and a future feels like it's an uphill battle.

If we live in a way where we're so focused on the future and we're barreling forward into that and busy and focused and active on some future goal, then we're not connected enough to our history and what makes us us.

And we're also not present to those around us or the presence of God in the moment. And there's something about finding enough balance, enough closure in the past that we can have peace, enough drawing on what has shaped us, a clear enough sense of our future, a vision that God has plans for us to prosper us and not to harm us and a hope for that future.

[18:52] But to be present enough to those around us and also to the presence of God in this moment now where the kingdom comes. And nature is an amazing way of being present in that way.

In Matthew 11, 28, is that verse well known for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. And in the message translation of that, it says this, are you tired, worn out, burned out on religion?

Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me. Watch how I do it.

Learn the unformed rhythms of grace, unforced rhythms of grace. And this speaks about being present in the moment with God's desire to connect, encounter, touch us, heal us, speak to us, inspire us as well.

But we have to slow enough to be present. There's a wonderful book called A Three Mile An Hour God. And this notion that actually we have to go at walking pace if we're going to go slow enough to encounter what God wants to say to us and hear God's voice.

[20:15] So let's just take a moment to open up to the Holy Spirit's nudge and speaking to us. And I just want to use a prayer from Tyler Statton. in response to this challenge of how to be present to the Holy Spirit in the moment.

Oh God, I offer you now all that I really have to give and all you really want, my full and undivided presence. I'm here wholly and entirely with you.

What are you saying to me now? Where are you directing my attention?

How are you offering me your affection? Amen. And part three.

Oh crap. A friend, someone I work with called Peter Robertson wrote a book and in that book he explores this theme of why do we fail to respond to the climate crisis?

[21:35] And his conclusion is that, and Simon touched on this last week, before the Industrial Revolution as humans we were so in touch with nature and the environment.

And if something wasn't working with growing our food we would respond and do something about it. If our waterway was unclear we would do something about it because we lived on it, we depended on it. And with the Industrial Revolution with the acceleration, the expansion, the mechanisation of farming and industrial scale farming and moving away from being involved to nature and disconnected in cities that this break in the brain has occurred and in the body where we

cannot feel the jeopardy in nature we're not connected to it and that we won't respond until it's too late.

It's a pretty inspiring and deeply depressing book. Lynn White Jr. is an American professor and historian. He wrote a really well-known paper in the 1960s in which he challenges that modern environmental problems stem from the Christian view that we have dominion over the earth. And there's something of that right-wing evangelical thinking coming through more, more visibly in the idea of drill, baby drill that in the end times there'll be a new heaven and a new earth that just take what you need.

But interestingly there has been a shift more recently in ecological environmental writers saying maybe the only hope we have left are Christians because they will believe and understand that their God created this earth and that they have a responsibility to take care of it.

[23 : 25] John Calvin, the theologian from the Reformation said this, humans are given the earth to care for and use to pass on to future generations in as good or better condition they should not abuse it through greed or carelessness.

John Christophages is an orthodox theologian from Australia, Greek Orthodox. He says this, we must disabuse ourselves of the commonplace misinterpretation of the Old Testament command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it.

For centuries this text has provided the license to dominate and abuse the world according to our selfish needs and purposes. If we do this we fall short of our vocation to care for creation that God has given us.

So what is our response? Shouldn't we as Christians be the greenest of all because we understand this is God's creation creation?

And it's tricky. It's tricky to think about what difference we can make when we think about large AI data centers being formed that use up to the power from one to two million homes just running the data center of which there will be thousands within a few years.

[24 : 56] And I want to draw on Dr. Michael Mosley. Some of you may know him. He had a wonderful program on Radio 4 which won just one thing. What one small thing might you do that might have a profound effect on your health long term?

And I want us to consider that question for us. What one thing might we do that might be outworking that call to take responsibility for the earth?

what is it that God might prompt us to do to be responsible for God's creation? Not such a fun finish this morning.

But let's just draw this together in a moment of prayer. Maybe the band could come up and begin to be ready for drawing this morning to a close. One thing we can do is pray.

So as you sign up for 24-7 and come along praying for the impact on the earth and praying for leaders' choices and praying for how we as a church might respond is a really meaningful response.

[26 : 16] So three themes from Genesis. this is a creator God who designed us to be in relationship. We have creation around us and God is visible in that creation.

It has this incredible effect on our bodies and minds that it's sort of been discovered in neuroscience but actually I think it's God's design. And we can be so out of tune with our responsibility for the earth.

So may that be our prayer as we go from here that the living God who breathes his life into all creation and to us might send us out to overflow and bring that life to others.
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