

In the beginning

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[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit, our teacher, and your great glory, our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. It might seem strange, before a sermon on Genesis 1, introducing a series on Genesis 1-11 to sing the hymn, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.

But sometimes surprising things, or even strange things, are helpful. What is it we see when we take up Isaac Watts' invitation and survey the wondrous cross?

A dying saviour? God's work of grace in the forgiveness of sins? The victory of Christ over every enemy? We see a place for us, a spot marked out with our name, where we are to go and kneel in the shadow of the cross, and accept the judgment of God upon our sin.

A place where we kneel and submit to Jesus being our saviour, and acknowledge that only he can take away our guilt and our shame.

[1 : 34] We see all these things. We see the death of Christ, which is our hope in life and death. But as we see these things, are there not questions which rise up in our minds?

Why did God choose this way to make us right with him? Why would God choose to save us? Why would God bother about as insignificant a creature as I am?

Who is this God who sacrifices his own son for us, that we might be made right with him? And the only way to answer these questions which come for us as we survey the cross, is to survey God's story.

Who is God and what has he been doing and what is he doing now? What is God going to do in that final great act?

If we attempt to constrain our survey of the cross to act 5 and how it affects us, we're not going to get very far in our survey.

[3 : 03] If we constrain our survey of the cross to the historical events of the cross, what in God's story is act 4? We're going to end up with more questions than answers.

The whole story makes sense of any one part of the story. And that crucial centre of the story, if you like, the crux of the story, needs all the rest of God's story that we might plummet's depth.

And so this is why we thank God for his word written for us in Scripture. God has revealed his story to us, so that we can know him and his grace in every part of his story.

The whole story, every part of God's story, adds together to sing a song of grace and love which our Father God would sing over and upon us.

God loves you. God longs for you to know that he loves you. And that's why he has made himself and his story known to you.

[4 : 24] As we get to know God more, what we get to know even more than that is how much he loves us. We read his word, we sing his word, we pray his word, we live in his story.

And God makes his love and grace known to us. These next few weeks we're going to be reading through Genesis 1 to 11.

It's only 11 chapters. It will be a blessing to you to read over those 11 chapters. Once, twice, three times over the coming weeks.

And every time you do it, God will make himself known to you and bless you with his grace and his love. These first chapters in the Bible, Genesis 1 to 11, they introduce the whole Bible story.

God, creation, humanity, sin, redemption, the renewal and recreation of all things. They are all introduced in just 11 chapters.

[5 : 37] These first chapters in the Bible, Genesis 1 to 11, are written to shape our world view. World view has become a word that's used to describe how we think about everything there is.

How we make sense of the whole world and our life and our place in it is our world view. The Bible is about shaping us to a biblical world view, a godly world view, a Christ-dependent world view.

And Genesis 1 to 11 begins that task of reframing our thinking so that we think godly thoughts after him.

All of our lives are shaped by God. And the foundation of the cross is laid here. The foundation of the cross begins in the eternal relationship of the Father and the Son.

But the revelation of that cross begins here in Genesis 1 to 11. This is the beginning of our hope, our faith, our mission, our joy, our peace, our fellowship with Jesus and with one another.

[7 : 03] And so we rejoice to read these words and to know God in them. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

The revelation given in Genesis 1 is about God and it is from God. Using the common word for God, the Bible introduces us to the unique God, the one and only God.

The noun God is used by us in our culture and by many others over many centuries to identify all manner of beings and things, none of whom are God.

There is only one God, the one great God of the Bible, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who sends the Holy Spirit upon us.

He alone is God. There are other creation stories and we'll maybe mention some of them today and next week from the ancient world from Mesopotamia.

[8 : 19] They present many gods who war amongst themselves. They kill a dragon and carve up its carcass and from the remains of this dead dragon they create the earth.

And then they decide that looking after the earth is too much for them so they make humans. And the text says they make humans to be their slaves, to do the work that they don't want to do so they can take the rest of eternity off.

One would imagine having eternity off is going to get a bit boring but that's what these so-called gods thought they would do to entertain themselves. In some ways the text of Genesis 1 and 2 mirrors the style of these ancient stories.

But in the way that the Bible tells the story it proves the falsehood of all these other creation accounts.

They are false and deceptive. They are a creation of humans rather than the revelation of God. The one God who created all things is a God who seeks to bless creation.

[9 : 42] Throughout the chapter God speaks and what God speaks happens. There is a unity of word and deed. When we read of God blessing and if you think about it for a minute the word bless isn't easy to give an explanation of but try this one.

When we think of God blessing what he's doing is he's thinking of a good thing he's speaking a good thing and the good thing happens.

God blessing us is God doing the good thing that we need done for us. There is no one else like this God.

This God alone speaks and he makes what he says happen by the power of his word. I'm sure you noticed as Gordon read through Genesis 1 there's quite a lot of repetition.

The same words and phrases come up again and again. That's absolutely intentional. Don't skip over the repeated things. They are there to drive them into our heads and our hearts.

[11 : 08] 35 times in this chapter God is named. God is mentioned 35 times. The absolute focus of this chapter is upon God.

Not on any other being or thing but God. God is the creator. God is not part of his creation. God is not limited or constrained by his creation.

Rather God is the one who imposes limits upon what he has made. God is the one who controls and sustains who involves himself in the creation he has created.

God is not some detached watchmaker who winds it up and sets the system going and then is absent. God is involved and is present in his creation.

creation is God's story. Creation is God displaying his grace making himself known as a powerful and generous God.

[12 : 24] And so every time we read these words every time we hear these words it's time for us to decide is this the God we want to serve is this the God we want to love and depend upon.

Do we want to be part of this God's story? This story tells us that too often women and men have rejected this God.

They've said okay you've made yourself known to us but we don't want you. We would rather make gods of our own imagination to do the things we want them to do.

Later on in the story Elijah will cry out to the people how long are you going to dither between two opinions? Either God is God or he's not.

And you need to decide are you going to depend upon this God of the Bible? Are you going to love him and be part of his story?

[13 : 36] The thing is it's not a real choice because there's no other God. There is no other story. You reject this God you reject everything.

There is only this one God. Will this one and only God be our God? God or will we join in the manufacture of idols made in our own image and try to serve them because they certainly can't serve us?

Will we depend upon this one dependable gracious God? Or will we trust the false gods of this age? God reveals himself to us not for our entertainment.

It is not ta-da look. God reveals himself that we might know him and trust him. That we might come to him and live together with him.

You cannot hover between two opinions. God is graciously calling you. God is graciously making himself known to you.

[14 : 51] Come to him. Let him be your God. Another repetition.

Seven times in Genesis 1 we read the word good. In this chapter only God gets to declare what's good. That's because God in himself is the entire measure and standard of what is good.

Only that which has been graciously created by God is good. All of the work of God is good. And the work of God is carefully balanced.

Here we are. On the first three days, on each day, God creates a sphere, if you like, an area, a realm within creation.

If you can consider light a physical area for a moment. And then in the next three days, four to six, God creates appropriate things to fill the area which he created in each day in the first days.

[16 : 01] So if light is a realm, then lights in the sky are the appropriate thing to live or to be in that realm. I wonder if you noticed that nice way the text puts it in verse 16 as Gordon was reading through.

God created the two great lights, one for the day and one for the night, oh, and also the stars. Really? And also the stars?

There's millions of them. Wow, how good is God? In passing, and I only mention this because somebody is going to ask me about it afterwards, Janus is one I don't think is in the least bit interested in whether the days are periods of time or 24 hours or what they are.

Janus is one is interested in God and who he is and what he has done. If you are to ask me, I suppose I reckon they're all 24 hour days, but I'm not going to fall out with anyone who thinks they're six periods of time because the text isn't really interested in that.

The text is interested in the God who has made all things and made all things good. Over all that he created, God declares it is good.

[17 : 29] At the end he says it is very good. The word good can suggest something that feels good or looks good or that is morally good and it means all of those.

Questions will arise in Genesis 2 and 3 over whether creation is actually good. or when it becomes good or whether it includes bad things and where the badness in creation has come from.

We'll get to those questions. Genesis 1 declares that badness does not come from creation itself. God checked it out and made sure it was all good.

When we stand together in the presence of God, we will see all he has done and the new song of praise we will sing together is of his goodness and that everything he has done is good.

The goodness in creation belongs to the one and only God. We know that all God has created is good because God himself is good. There is no shadow in God caused by any turning.

[18 : 40] God's name. The Bible we read is God's own word. We trust our one God and so we can trust his gracious word.

One of the elements of creation that has caused mystery for scientists for many years is the humble bee. You might know that scientists concluded that the bee can't fly.

it's the wrong shape and its wings are too small and its body mass is too great or whatever they decided. I love to imagine bees all over the world getting out to the edge of their hive and having one of those wee smiles.

You know, hmm, I hope there's a scientist watching because I'm just about to fly and it jumps off and it flies. Well, the world is just like this.

so many scientists. It will tell us that we cannot trust God's word. We can tell it, it will try to tell us that this Bible is not even God's word at all.

[19 : 51] That we shouldn't, we shouldn't look to it or read it or depend upon it in any way. I love to imagine our Bibles, whenever we pick them up, as though the front cover had a wee smile on its face.

Hmm, I'm just going to show them. Because every time we open it, God's good word does its sovereign work in transforming our lives.

I imagine our mothers and fathers in faith gently smiling and they would say to us, we trusted it and found it was true. You can trust it also.

God is good and has given us his good word that we might know about his goodness and trust him in it and be blessed by him.

Genesis 1 to 11 has not been given to us by our God that we might argue about the terms and the features of what God says here, but that we might learn to know him.

[20 : 59] This book, these words of God are the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom, here is the royal law, these are the lively oracles of God.

In creation and in scripture, God is making himself known to you. Receive his words, love his words, treasure his words, read his words, talk about them often, know your God in them, trust them, depend upon them.

These words are life and hope for you and for us all. I'm sure you've watched some of these based on a true story films or biofilms where they tell us about people or things or situations and they don't tell us the whole story, they tell us part of the story and then at the end the screen fades to black and up come some words on the screen.

This story continued and here's how it continued and this is what happened next. They give us information, they focus on the principal character of the film.

So imagine we get to the end of Genesis 1 and the screen fades to black and then some words appear on the screen. thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them and on the seventh day God finished all his work that he had done and rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

[22 : 38] So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

the start of Genesis 2 wants to leave us in no doubt about who the main character has been in Genesis 1.

It's all about God. It is all about God making himself known. There is no mother God.

There is no spontaneous creation. there is only the work of Father God our loving God and our gracious Father.

There was a scientist back in the 60s they gave him a Nobel Prize. This isn't why they gave him the prize by the way but here's what he said about creation. He said there are only two options.

[23 : 37] Either there's a creator or everything that is spontaneously appeared from nowhere. He then wrote we don't like the idea of a creator so we dismiss that and we choose to believe something we know cannot have happened because we so much don't want to believe in a creator and they gave that man a Nobel Prize.

Really? Would you rather choose something you know couldn't happen? that receive the revelation of God who loves you when he says he made everything?

He made everything. The unity and wonder of creation declare for us the glory of God. Without the need for human language the stars cry out his glory night after night.

There are so many stars that we've run out of names for them all. We have to give them numbers. But God says I call them all out by name and set them in their place.

And Janus 1 says oh hi also the stars. I like to imagine that one day in the midst of creation God said the word Daisy. And this wee thing appeared and it was white round the edges and yellow in the middle and God loved it so much he packed his hands and he said Daisy again.

[25 : 12] And Daisy Daisy and millions of them appeared. Just because God was happy at seeing a Daisy in a field. John Calvin wrote of creation as a theatre for the display of God's glory.

Why do we go to the theatre or the cinema? We go to sit back in wonder. To be amazed by the performance moments before us.

To be gripped and moved and shaken to the core of our being. And it's as though God says I've got a seat with your name on it. Come and sit down and creation will perform before you the glory of God.

The God we trust is the God who created all things. He can hold you through the turns and trials of your life. The God we know is the God who made us.

We are not in charge. The universe is not all about us. We are rightly humbled before this great and glorious God.

[26 : 28] The God we depend upon is the God who created countless stars and countless daisies just because he loved them. And he will provide for us and care for us every day.

The glory of God the same creation glory is displayed for us in the cross of Christ. The same God who made all things offers us his son a sacrifice for us that we might be made right with him and brought home to his glorious presence.

the wonder of the cross leads us to the wonder of the creator who loves us this much. God did not hold back when he generously created.

God did not hold back when he gave his son Jesus for us and our salvation. Do not hold back today. Give him everything you are.

Give him everything you have. Do not hold back. All the praise and glory belong to this one God. All of our lives belong to him to live in his story.

[27 : 50] Do not hold back because God is not holding back on you. Let's pray together. God our Father we rejoice that you are making yourself known to us in the wonders of your creation.

Open our eyes. Let us see you in all you have done, in all you have made. And as we see you and know you transform our lives, fix us in your story.

that we might live for your glory and declare your glory before all creation. Be at work among us we pray.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.