

Understanding who God is

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[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 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 waters. 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.

[1 : 08] 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 on the earth.

And it was so. 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.

[2 : 13] And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and for 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 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.

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 in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.

[3 : 23] 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 upon the earth.

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.

[4 : 37] 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.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

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. Well, good morning, everyone.

[5 : 43] My name's Dave. I'm one of the pastors here. Will you please pray with me as we come to God's word? Lord of heaven and earth, help us come to your word today, not trying to have all our questions answered, but coming to listen to you, to give so that we might be asking the right questions.

Father, I pray that you would blow us away with just how good you are as our creator and our redeemer. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, what is the point of Genesis chapters 1 to 3? It's a very well-known passage, so I feel like I need to address a few things.

Some people listening today might see as much point in it as perhaps they do the Greek mythologies and other ancient beliefs. I was sitting in the dentist's waiting room just last week, and on the TV came a commercial.

Maybe you've seen it. A bright light followed by stars swirling, a gloomy earth and a volcano erupting, a brutish man walking, and then a child blowing out candles, and then a rocket launching to the moon, and out of the mouth of a man comes a word, wow.

[7 : 13] And this man is standing in the aisles of Audi, looking at the specials for the week. Wow. Now, this modern story might sound more sophisticated than these ancient narratives, but can it satisfy your heart's yearnings to know why is there something rather than nothing?

Why is there such order that makes predicting weather patterns and quantum entanglement, whatever, I can't understand it, why is that even possible out of mindless chaos?

Why is there conscious life, personality, that even is yearning like this? Is there any hope to overcome the mess and darkness and death in my world, in my life?

Who am I? What is my place in this universe? Does my life have meaning? All these yearnings. Stephen Jay Gould, an evolutionary biologist, here's his advice. We're here simply because one odd group of fish had a peculiar anatomy that just happened to be able to transform itself into legs for terrestrial creatures.

[8 : 49] We're here just because comets struck the earth and wiped out dinosaurs and gave mammals a chance. We are here just for those reasons. We yearn for a higher answer, but none exists.

This explanation, though superficially troubling, if not terrifying, is ultimately liberating. We have to construct, therefore, any meaning ourselves.

So if you want to discredit all your longings of your heart and the longings that every human being all over the earth have, if you want to discredit all those yearnings, then by all means, go construct your meaning buying the specials at Audi.

But then what's the point of Genesis chapters 1 to 3? Was it written to answer our scientific questions?

As I'm trying to get across, I think it's answering something much more profound for us to know how to live well, answering the yearnings of our heart.

[10 : 01] So is the point to tell us if the seven days refer to 24-hour periods or seven undefined eras of time?

Yes, I'm just going to deal with this and move on because some of you are waiting for it. And I'm going to satisfy no one.

I'm just going to say, by all means, look into it. Study it. Study scripture. Study science. Discuss it. Debate it. Come to your convictions on it.

As long as Adam and Eve are historical people, as Romans 5 and other scripture clearly says, come to your convictions. But if you focus on that question, you're missing the bigger questions that Genesis 1 is answering, those yearnings of our heart.

Who made and governs the universe? Who am I? Who are people in this universe? What's the goal? What's the point? What's the purpose? And what went wrong?

[11:12] They are much bigger questions that Genesis 1 has lots to say. That makes more sense of why Moses wrote this to Israel, who have just been set free from Egypt.

They're in the wilderness. The wilderness. And they're waiting to come into that promised land of rest and blessing. What do they need to know?

Well, they need to know, Genesis 1 to 11, chapters 1 to 11, that the spread of sin and its destructive effects. And they need to know who they are, that God has set in a plan to bring blessing to the world through Abraham and his chosen descendant.

That's what they need to know. They need to know who God is, who are we as his people, his purposes to bless the world, and why are we in the wilderness and not in Eden?

That's what we need to know. And we need to know the same things today to answer the longings of our own heart. As a church family, we're entering a year of change, at least this year or coming few years.

[12:28] We need new elders to govern and guide the church. We need a new pastor, as Cordwood looks to pass on the baton to the next generation.

We need a new constitution. We have so many new people in the church in the past few years and we need to gather together under the same truth and head in the same direction. We've got a lot of change.

But like Israel in the wilderness, we need to just focus on what doesn't change. We need to get our bearings. We need to know the unchangeable God.

We need to know his unchangeable determination to fully bring about that rest and blessing he created the world for. We need to know who we are as his people, his image bearers, and we need to know what went wrong.

If we know all this, then we will stick to the gospel of Jesus Christ, that in him we have rest and blessing. There might be lots of change, but really the big things, they're not changing at all.

[13:38] So that's why we're doing Genesis 1-3 this term. So we're going to be focusing on just the first three chapters for the whole term. So let's get into it. Let's get into the text. First we come to who is God.

And verse 1 makes the who very clear. In the beginning, God. Nothing else.

There was a starting point of space and time as we know it. Things are not in this cyclical reincarnation cycle. There was a beginning. But before anything was, God was.

And this is crucial because God is not part of his creation, like Avatar with, who is it, Ewa. God's not part of the creation. Creation is not an extension of God.

God is above creation, but he's always involved in it. He's before creation. He has authority over all of it. Which obviously might ask the question in all of our minds, like what was God doing before the beginning?

[14:49] If before the beginning, obviously logically doesn't make sense, but before space and time, what was God doing? And scripture actually has a lot to tell us. The father was loving the son.

God was making plans, not only for creation, but for history, for it to culminate in his son. We're told that God was making promises even. And Francis Schaeffer points out the point here.

Prior to Genesis 1.1, love and communication are intrinsic to what always has been. God didn't need creation in order for his identity as creator to be realised.

He wasn't bored. He wasn't lazy. Like the ancient mythologies say, they created people to do all the hack work. He's not lazy. He wasn't lonely.

He was in eternal, loving community, father, son and spirit, totally self-sufficient, totally at peace, totally full of joy. He didn't need to create.

[15:58] But he did. He freely chose to create, to display his glory, to share his life. The word create here in verse 1 is a special word in scripture that only God is the subject of this verb.

This word create here, only God does this sort of creating. Yes, we reflect him as we are creative people, but only God does this sort of creating. In verse 1, he creates everything out of nothing.

No mass, no energy, no supplies. He didn't have to go back to Bunnings because he forgot something the first time. He had no blueprint.

He had no blueprint. He had no angel engineer. He was consulting. All his wisdom, all out of his power, all out of his goodness, he created.

The heavens and the earth, and that's a poetic device just to say everything. All things belong to him. All things belong to him. As creator, he has the right to do with all things as he pleases.

[17:15] All things owe their being to him alone. And then we come to verse 2, which might seem strange at first, but it's the key that unlocks the flow of the chapter.

By his word, this God, he is the kind of God who creates order out of chaos. So we've got, the earth was without form and void.

So without form and empty. And darkness was over the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. So without form, there's no distinction and it was empty.

It was lifeless. So this shows us the two stages that God fashioned everything. We've got day 1, 2 and 3 where God separates, he distinguishes and he creates the conditions for life.

And then we've got day 4, 5, day 4, 5 and 6 where he fills it with life. So without form, he forms it. empty, he fills it.

[18:30] He brings order out of chaos. Some see in this verse a spiritual description alluding to Satan's rebellion causing this chaos.

Others just see it as a description of the physical earth as it was after he created it. It just wasn't fashioned yet. Either way, it tells us what kind of God he is.

He doesn't want chaos. He doesn't accept darkness as a necessary evil. He certainly doesn't call darkness good. But he's present, he is above it and he brings order out of chaos, he brings light out of darkness, he brings life out of emptiness.

That's the kind of God he is. To consider just the contrast in Moses' day, I just want to share snapshots of the ancient Babylonian creation account, the Enuma Elish.

So in that story, and this isn't just some tribal group saying this, this is a Babylonian empire, this is a pretty big story of the day. A God named Absu, who represented Sweetwater, and his wife Tiamat, Saltwater, they bore children and grandchildren but they became, I shouldn't laugh, they became so noisy that Absu decided to murder his sons and grandsons to have silence again.

[20:02] I really shouldn't laugh, that shows how wicked I am, but maybe you can relate to warning silence. One of his sons murdered him first and then another one of the sons, Marduk, the greatest of all the gods started fighting Tiamat.

Tiamat created dragons and beasts, Marduk killed her with an arrow, stood on her body, split her skull, sorry kids, cut her arteries, he took her body and divided it into two parts, one part becoming the sky, the other part the earth, then Marduk created people to do all the menial work, so that the gods could relax.

And God said, let there be light. And there was light. God said, let there be, and it was so.

Let there be, and it was so. personal, totally sovereign, rational word, formed and filled the heavens and the earth.

God separates the material matter, putting the structure in place for life to flourish.

[21:41] I'm going to try and move through these verses pretty quickly and just point out a few things. So dividing, separating, distinguishing is a key theme running through Genesis 1.

life requires things to be distinct from another, in their place, serving their purpose. Notice in verse 4 that God only calls the light good, not the darkness.

He separates the light and darkness, the mutually exclusive. Notice too that he names the light day and darkness night.

So in ancient times if you name something, that's the prerogative of the one in charge. I suppose we still do today. You name your children.

It's your prerogative to do that. You're in charge. Throughout Genesis 1 he's naming. He's in charge. For Israel they were to have total confidence that the Lord alone was supreme in the heavens.

[22:50] The nations, they're just worshipping created things. Then we've got day two. We have the separation of the water above from the water below which we would call our atmosphere.

But notice God doesn't call it good yet because his purposes for the water isn't complete. that comes in day three. God separates the ocean from the land.

Now the water is fulfilling its good purposes and he calls it good. Then we have vegetation which in Hebrew thinking apparently vegetation wasn't living as we kind of see it.

And each according to their kind. Everything was specific enough to be identified and yet incredible diversity. I just found out that you all know what a gum tree is, right?

Yep, anyway. A gum tree, I don't know why I paused there. Apparently there's over 900 different types of gum tree. Like, I don't, sometimes I get uncomfortable with how much I don't know.

[24 : 02] Specificity but such diversity, isn't there? Notice too, the fertility of the earth is by God's decree. It's his blessing. Israel shouldn't participate in the pagan, depraved fertility rituals.

It's by God's word that life is given. Perhaps in our society's world view, in this cause and effect, as if this is a closed system, we need to remember, no, no, no.

Life comes by God's word. He is very involved. That herb garden only grows with him causing it to grow.

So day one, two, and three, the forming is complete and we come days four through six. He starts to fill. Day four, we've got the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars.

They serve mankind for days and years. Again, Israel shouldn't follow the Babylonians. We're trying to read their future in the stars. The stars are made to declare the glory of God.

[25 : 17] I think it's one of the biggest downsides of living in the city. I see a few people from Tamworth here. Just to get that witness of God's glory in the sky, it's one of the things you miss from the country.

Then day five, conscious life comes, filling the atmosphere in the oceans. And here in verse 21, we've got that special word create again, as we had in verse one.

When conscious life comes in, we've got this special word create. He created conscious life, animals. And again, fertility of your herds is by God's gift, not by appeasing the pagan gods.

And then day six, we come to the climax with all the animals of the land and mankind. Chapter two, verse seven, speaks of this.

Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Yes, we are animals, we are of the ground, but we are so much more than animals, which is where we need to so depart from the story of our culture around us today.

[26 : 40] Man is set apart, mankind. I found this threefold phrase helpful. We're set apart by divine plan.

Let us make God planned divine pattern in our image, our likeness, for divine purpose, to have dominion.

And that word, that special word create, in case we miss, that something special is happening here, it's used three times to emphasise the point. So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him, male and female, he created them. This is what it's all been heading for. Us, can you believe it?

Mankind is the bridge between earth and heaven. We were made to know and relate to the creator. And we were made to represent the creator in his goodness as we care for this world.

[27 : 43] We are the bridge. In a sense, everything else was so that we could have life and so that we can see the glory of God and praise God with our hearts and mouths and lives.

Human beings in the image of God, regardless of capability, whether old or in the womb, whether a celebrity or in power or the lowest in society, each human being has infinite, divine, divine is that the right word?

We reflect the worth of God himself. You have never met an ordinary person. So we better treat each other that way. And God speaks to himself in the plural.

Let us make in our image, we reflect God not only as individuals, although that's true, but also as we relate to one another in friendship, in marriage, in community, because we reflect God, who God is, the eternal community, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And we're going to look into this much more as we get into chapter two next week. But this is a radical teaching. It was radical back then. It is radical today, isn't it?

[29 : 05] It is the bedrock for how we treat people with value. It is how we know what our purpose is. Francis Schaeffer again, he says, people today can no longer answer that crucial question, who am I?

A Christian doesn't have this problem. We have the gift of knowing who we are. We are in the image of God. And so the sixth day finishes with God commissioning and blessing mankind.

Adam and Eve have deep personal fulfilment, totally in a blessed state. Everything was at peace with itself, at peace with the creator, at peace with man, within itself, within people, totally at peace. And God looks at all he has made once man has arrived and is very good. God is righteous. He only blesses what is good.

God is good. What is good is not your subjective opinion. It's God's opinion of what is good. When what he has made fulfills his purposes, then it is good.

[30 : 26] That's when he blesses. He will only bless what is good and what he says is good is deeply fulfilling. So we come to the why of creation, God's goal on day seven.

Where are we? Chapter two, verses one to three. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

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. Now as Jacob helpfully taught the kids, this isn't talking about people resting.

This is talking about God resting, which can't mean he gets tired. He didn't need a nap. He didn't need to put his feet up.

He didn't need a holiday. He didn't need to catch his breath. This is saying God stopped his creating work because it was done. Everything was in order. Everything was at peace.

[31 : 43] Everything was glorifying God and having his blessing. He had no work to do. Everything was in proper relationship with God. And so he made it holy.

He's elevated above the other days. Day six is not the end point. The purpose of all this is day seven. It's resting. God enjoying his creation.

Like a builder of a house. He builds the house and he puts his tools down. He doesn't just stand outside. He goes in and he enjoys it. He's finished the work and now he wants to rest in it.

That's the goal. God wants to enjoy his creation as all things glorify him. Tim Keller draws out the implication for us today.

The fulfillment we've been looking for in our work, in building skyscrapers, in having wonderful spouses, in having lots of children, in making money, the blessing we've been looking for is actually in the face of God.

[33 : 00] Enjoying God. Living for him. God didn't do any more work until the rebellion of man ushered in a new darkness and a new chaos.

But we'll come to that in chapter three. Creation tells us God is a redeeming God. He brings order out of chaos, light out of darkness, life out of emptiness.

He is absolutely sovereign over every speck, everything. He works by his powerful word and that he is determined that heaven and earth will be in order and good and have his blessing and enjoy rest. He is determined to have that. And the obvious question is, why isn't that our daily experience? Why don't we have that rest and blessing? Why is there chaos in my own mind and heart? Why is there chaos in my relationships and in my work?

[34 : 14] Why is there chaos in the world, in society and nature? Why is there chaos in the world, why is there chaos in the world? Obviously, we'll spend more time as we come to chapter three.

But can I say for now, how you answer this question will depend on your starting point for answering it. If you start with your own thinking and your own experience, your own reasoning, then you'll come out with distorted answers at the other end.

Like some conclude that darkness is good, that it both existed with light. It's just always been this balance in the universe or something, or that death is just a part of life.

They call death good. It's distorted thinking. Or that God is not good, or that he's not God. Like the ancient mythologies, seeing God as violent and jealous and hateful and sexually perverse like human beings.

If you start with your own thinking and work out God, you'll come out with weird and distorted conclusions.

[35 : 26] Will you let the word of your creator be your starting point for answering that question? He is your reference point. He wants his world perfectly in order and full of his blessing.

It was good originally. So here we have the framework for understanding how good God is and how our sin has plunged the world into chaos again.

There is one creator, and yet who of us consistently looks to him as the source of life and the one to whom everything I am and all I have belongs?

It gives us a framework for understanding our problem. Mankind was made to represent God's glory, and yet we seek our own glory. And we treat other people made in his image with violence, with our words and choices.

Mankind was made to know and relate to God, and yet we look to created things to find that deep fulfillment we're all craving. The blessing of life is found in resting with God, and yet we think we can get blessing for ourselves, trying to be God.

[36 : 53] The God whose word breathed out the heavens and the oceans roared and moved at his command, and yet we don't listen to his word as we ought to.

We don't believe that his word is the way to blessing, and if we don't believe his word is the way to blessing, really we're saying, God, you're not good. This gives us the framework to expose us and the real problem.

But that's not the end of the story. Our creator is so good and he's so determined to restore order and rest and blessing.

In term two this year, we're going to get back into the Gospel of Matthew. And the part we're up to in Matthew has blown me away in preparing Genesis 1 this week.

So I just can't wait to say it, so I'm saying it today. It's when Jesus walks on the water. Now when Jesus walks on the water to his disciples on the boat, our society mocks that miracle, don't they?

[38 : 09] And I've got to be honest with you, I find that miracle a bit perplexing because all the other miracles, he's healing, he's raising the dead, they're full of compassion, but walking on water kind of seems like he's showing off.

I've struggled with it until I've appreciated Genesis 1 verse 2. Do you see who is walking on the waves of the deep in the darkness of the night?

He is the one who's above the chaos and can save us from it. He's not just above, but he entered it and took it on himself.

And in his dying breath, he finishes his work of salvation.

It is finished. Our hearts yearn for rest and blessing and the good news is that the Creator has come and he has restored his creation and he offers you rest and blessing.

[39 : 35] Getting back in order with your Creator to know that he is good and wants to bless you as you are in right relationship with him.

So will you look to the cross of Jesus and know once and for all that your Creator is good and that it's your heart that is the one that's out of order and he can give you rest and blessing.

I'm going to finish with the words of 2 Corinthians. for God who said that light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

rest and blessing are found in him. Let's pray. Father, I pray that your Spirit once again would be moving over the darkness of each of our hearts to show us more of who you are in the face of Jesus.

and for anyone who doesn't know you as their good Creator and their Saviour I pray that your Spirit might be moving and speaking life into their hearts into our hearts.

[41 : 03] In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen.