

Creation

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Date: 01 August 2019

Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 00] Would you pray with me as we begin? Our Father in heaven, our eyes are so often on ourselves and it's quite overwhelming when we just focus on ourselves and we pray that you would speak to us this morning through Isaiah 40 and just lift our eyes above to look at you, to see you clearly.

Lord, we can't do this by our own strength. We need your help to do this. So please show us your glory this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, do you feel the burden of trying to create paradise on earth? You know that mirage that is just up ahead of you where everything in life is finally sorted and in place.

Your health being under control, enough money in the bank for bills and lifestyle and then a buffer. Succeeding in your work or study, feeling competent, important, but not too stressed.

Having that intimate relationship with not major arguments. Your children respecting you and thriving at school, feeling like you belong in the church community.

[1 : 26] Having that perfect balance between family and church and leisure and work and sleeping well at night. And maybe you really want people around you to come to know Jesus and you want people to be integrated in the church, growing in their faith and love, and you want society ordered in a way that pleases God.

It can be overwhelming at times, can't it? Sounds pretty good. Sometimes we feel close to getting it, don't we?

We're just on the verge of that mirage. Like when we get accepted for that job, we think everything else will just fall into place. But I think the rest of the time, our usual experience is we're just striving to create this paradise.

And it can just feel like a burden. It can feel very heavy. Especially when one of two things happens. First, sometimes we encounter people who have a different idea of paradise and their idea of paradise just gets in the way of mine.

Or just things beyond our control. Just make all our efforts useless. So do you feel the burden of trying to create paradise?

[3 : 04] In the time of Isaiah, speaking chapter 40, Israel was meant to be Yahweh's unique covenant people, living in Yahweh's promised land, with him ruling and protecting them through their king, and having Yahweh dwelling among them, represented by the grand temple that Solomon built.

But at this point in time, because of the seemingly unstoppable force of the Babylonian empire, they lived outside the land. Their last king to sit on the throne had his eyes plucked out.

And the temple is burnt down and demolished. If you were living then, how confident would you be that your God alone created the heavens and the earth?

How confident would you be that God's plan for his world is on track? How confident are you today?

that God alone created and rules all things, and therefore his plan is on track? We need to appreciate who created all things.

[4 : 44] This morning we're not going to spend our time looking into the details of how God created the world, the debate, the discussion, whether it's seven literal days or not, the age of the universe.

These questions are fine to investigate. But to live well, we need to know what God's purpose for his creation is.

We need to know the who and the why. So that's why we're looking at Isaiah 40, because Isaiah 40 just has these brilliant images that help us look up and see the who.

So let's do that. Verse 12. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?

And marked off the heavens with a span.

[5 : 56] Now, I've used this illustration a couple of years ago. The average hand span is somewhere between 15 and 25 centimetres. And if you imagine our sun in the sky, if its diameter is represented as one millimetre, then the distance from the sun to Earth is about 10 centimetres.

There are hundreds of millions of stars in our galaxy alone. And if you were to measure the distance to our nearest neighbour, on the scale we're using, it would be 30 kilometres away.

And God measures the entire universe. It's about that.

All the earth, all the heavens are simple and easily held with a single hand by the Lord alone.

Verse 13 and 14. Who has measured the spirit of the Lord? Or what man shows him his counsel?

[7 : 22] Whom did he consult? And who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice and taught him knowledge and showed him the way of understanding? The Lord did not need a training course.

He didn't need a YouTube video. He didn't need a second opinion to check his calculations. He didn't need a team of labourers to do the heavy lifting.

He didn't even need a Bunnings. He did it all by his own power and wisdom. Verse 28.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. Do you not know?

And it's not like God began all things and then just sat back and let it run its course. No, our creator continually sustains and governs all things.

[8 : 27] Have a look and listen and imagine verses 21 to 26. Do you not know? Do you not hear?

Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers.

Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them like a tent to dwell in. Who brings princes to nothing and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth when he blows on them and they wither and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

To whom then will you compare me that I should be like him? Says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who created all these.

[9 : 34] He who brings out their hosts by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

Do you struggle like me to remember names? Now people are important to me but I just, I struggle. You might have heard me last week call Jamie's Cosima Cosumi.

Each of the millions of stars in the billions of galaxies, God knows them fully. He knows them individually by name and they are in the exact place he wants them.

Isn't that good news? If he can do it with the stars, surely he knows us as well. I'm reminded when I look at the Southern Cross that one of those stars is about 88 light years away.

That's probably longer than, as in 88 years, that's probably longer than I'm going to live on this earth. And if God is sustaining that star, it just reminds me that God is sustaining me.

[11 : 02] It's in its place. He's got me in my place as well. What about society and human power and politics?

Did you see the image there that he used? That unstoppable Babylonian army that took you away, Israel? They're like a single drop in a bucket to me.

They're like the dust on the scales. They don't even register. All the might of human power is like our herb garden at home.

We've got coriander and parsley. But all of a sudden, our basil turned from green to black. There are forces much bigger than us that we feel is just beyond our control, but not to God.

To our Creator, all flesh is like grass. He easily controls them, rules over them.

[12 : 26] Do you think you're in control? We often speak as Christians as if it's a choice whether we live dependent on God or whether we try and strive by our own strength.

And in terms of our own attitude, that's a really good question to reflect on. But in terms of what just is, our existence, there is no choice.

You are utterly dependent on your Creator. You and I are dust. We are grass. We are extremely limited and vulnerable and utterly dependent.

Therefore, life and this world should all be seen as a gift, not as something we can control.

The Lord is the only one who created and governs all things. In year 12 at school, for my design and tech project, I made this coffee table and it had lights in it and it's meant to flash to the beat of the music and I poured hours and hours into that project and I needed a lot of help with it as well.

[13 : 55] Every millimetre, I was so careful and I put this custom-made glass top on it so that it protected the lights and so that it could be used as a coffee table.

Now, fast forward to a youth group event at my house. You already know it's not going to end well. And during a Bible study, some boys decided it would be a good idea if this coffee table was used as a chair and the glass cracked and so did my heart.

Because I made the coffee table, I had the right to say what its purpose was and what it wasn't for.

If it was one of you who broke the table, I really don't care that much. I've moved on. So what is God's purpose in making human beings and the entire cosmos?

We really need to know the answer to this question and amazingly, God has revealed it to us. Now, we could glean the answers from Isaiah 40. It is very clear in Isaiah 40 but let's flip back to Genesis 2.

[15 : 20] So could you turn back to Genesis 2 with me? To get to the heart of God's purpose, how would you answer this question?

Whose home did God build? Is earth a home for people or is it a home for God? If your first thoughts are anything like mine, you might be thinking God doesn't need a home.

The whole universe isn't big enough to contain God. And you'd be right. The Bible says that clearly. And then you consider the precision and the complexity of this world and it's just amazing.

Life thrives. The ocean is full of weird and wonderful things. The earth is just covered with plants and animals and people and the sky is full of birds.

We might think it's clearly designed for physical beings. And again, the Bible says that clearly. It is a home for us.

[16 : 42] But Genesis 2 gives an even fuller explanation for why God made everything. The key is in the first three verses.

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 the work that he had done in creation. Now God does not grow tired or weary.

He didn't need to have a sit down because he was tired. For God to rest means something along the lines of God enjoying, God having the purpose for which he made the world.

God so like a car enthusiast who after putting the engine back together goes for a drive after all the work of construction enjoys the car or like sitting around the family table after cooking a home home cooked meal.

[17 : 59] It's enjoying your creation or like a builder and his family moving in to his home after the construction is complete. Notice that unlike the other six days of creation that there's a definite finishing point with those.

There was evening and there was morning the first day. There was evening and there was morning the second day. But for the seventh day there is no finish. The theme of God's rest runs all the way through the Bible.

For God to rest is for God to enjoy the purpose for which he made the earth and the entire cosmos.

So have a listen to John Walton's explanation. I think he helped me understand this a bit clearer. This is what he says. On the seventh day we finally discover that God has been working to achieve a rest.

God does not set up the cosmos so that only people will have a place. He also sets up the cosmos to serve as his temple in which he will find rest.

[19 : 20] to serve as his temple in which he will find rest.

It is the place where God can be known and related to by his people who gladly live under his rule and enjoy the blessings of his presence.

we're told that the heavens exist to declare the glory of God. If they're just a place for us to live you've got to say the billions of galaxies is a bit of overkill but if the heavens exist for God in all his glory to be known by his people then a universe full of stars that makes us feel so very small and yet so full of joy as we stand in awe underneath them then they're about the right size.

The earth you walk on is a place for God to be known and worshipped. How does that sit with you?

I hope you have mixed feelings things. On the one hand I hope you feel a sense of peace and joy knowing that everything exists, your life exists for a greater purpose than yourself.

[20 : 54] There's a joy in that. On the other hand I hope you feel threatened that if life is pure gift and it's up to my creator to decide how I should live my life and my purpose is to have God at the centre of everything and for me to worship him and for him to get all the glory it threatens us being at the centre.

this earth and the entire cosmos is a temple a home for God to get all the glory.

Now perhaps you're wondering why I'm using the word temple it seems a little religious but temple gets across the idea of the divine dwelling place and temple gets across the idea that it's from this place that God rules and temple also pictures us people as priests whose job is to worship the Lord and whose job is to represent God to one another and as we rule this world under God's authority.

So although we are creatures mankind is unique in all God's creation.

We're told in Genesis 1 that God made people male and female in his image. To be in God's image it doesn't just mean that we are persons who have the faculties to think and to feel and to communicate to make choices to have relationship all these things are true to be in the image of God but all these things serve a greater purpose to reflect God's very character as we live in relationship with him as we worship him as we represent him to the rest of creation.

[23 : 20] God's rest God's purpose is for God to be present with his worshipful people his image bearing people in paradise and all this for his glory to fill the earth.

God God God God God God God But this isn't our usual everyday experience of life is it?

The blessings that flow like a river from God's presence are often far from our everyday experience. So I watched a movie recently based on the 2004 tsunami that hit in Indonesia and it just pictures a family on holiday by the pool and the parents are arguing about whether they should move house when they get back home when suddenly the tsunami hits.

All their plans come to nothing. Sickness hunts us down. our environment is more exploited than protected.

And this week our attention has been drawn to the abortion laws in Australia. We live in this society that pours so much money into healthcare and yet at the same time says that we can decide to destroy life.

[25 : 12] And then there's our relationships. Would you say that your usual experience is that we treat one another with the character of God?

God's presence and the paradise that flows from his presence, his rule, is just not our everyday experience. God says in his word there's a very good reason for that and we're going to explore this more next Sunday.

But let me say for now, ever since the first man Adam reached up in direct disobedience to his creator and he didn't do it by accident, he wanted to become like God even though as God's priest and image bearer in God's temple, he already enjoyed the greatest status and purpose and relationship possible.

Adam and everyone descended from him since has tried to usurp God's place in the world. Kick him off the throne.

As if you and I can control our world, creating our own version of paradise and all this without a need to know God or worship God.

[26 : 44] And the consequences of this have been felt ever since. When mankind was kicked out of the Garden of Eden, do you think paradise was the greatest thing we lost?

If paradise is the greatest thing we lost, then we're going to spend all our effort trying to get it back. I think we try to do this individually and as a society.

Or do you agree with John Walton again? He gives this answer. In the aftermath of the fall, the greatest loss was not paradise.

It was God's presence. God's presence. God's presence. God's presence. God's presence. God's presence. God's presence. God's presence. God's presence. God's presence.

God's presence. What was the greatest thing we lost after the fall? Paradise or God's presence? We come to the question, will God's rest, his purpose for creation be achieved?

[28 : 22] God's presence. Those who first heard Isaiah 40 would have had no circumstantial evidence to give them confidence that God's rest will be achieved.

And they knew that they were in such desperate situation because they had rejected God. God's desire God's presence, most of all, then these words of Isaiah 40 will be the best news to you.

From verse 3, a voice cries, in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low. The uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.

And all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. the one who said, let there be light, and light flooded the darkness, says, although you have chosen to live in darkness, I will come near to you.

[30 : 02] The glory of the Lord shall be revealed. And we would never have imagined what God meant by that until we read in the New Testament, in John's Gospel, and the word became flesh, and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. earth. The one who sits above the circle of the earth became like grass with us.

Seeing God in the flesh is so much clearer than the old temple building, but he also came for another reason.

If you think and picture Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, it was surrounded by basins of water for washing.

The smell of death from animal sacrifices for sin would have surrounded it day and night. And only the high priest, one person, could enter God's immediate presence once a year and he couldn't muck around.

[31 : 32] That building loudly proclaimed that sinful, God-usurping, idolatrous people could only come so close to God.

But in our creator's death, on the cross, we are now invited, come near.

Come near. Come near. Know that you are completely cleansed. God is coming near.

God is coming near to us by making our bodies his home, dwelling in us by his spirit. As we have come to see his glory in the Lord Jesus Christ, we worship him.

And we no longer live for ourselves, we live for him. God is going to be renewed day by day in the image of our creator. As we reflect the character of the God whom we worship, we bring his presence into every aspect of our life.

[33 : 01] Every arena that you walk in, we can reflect God in. And we can fill the world with his glory. glory. We don't want paradise without God's presence.

We still desperately want paradise. But we're waiting for it. We're waiting for God's paradise. Not our version.

And we know it's not yet. It's coming, but it's not yet. we will wait with certain hope, knowing that our creator, who does not grow tired or weary, will fully and finally achieve his rest.

And this is what he says in Revelation 21. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

[34 : 21] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

And he who was seated on the throne said, behold, I am making everything new.

Would you pray with me? Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we worship you alone as the creator and ruler of all things.

Thank you for coming near to us. Father, help us to live for you alone.

[35 : 45] help us live patiently, trusting that you will achieve your purposes.

And Lord, use us individually and together as your people for your glory, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

Amen. You amen. So, you