

A Good Creation

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[0 : 00] Father God, we thank you that you are a God who speaks, and therefore you've revealed yourself to us.

And even as we look at the very start of the beginning of your word, help us to hear well, help us to grasp what you are saying to us, and to be able to apply it to our lives, to be inspired by you because of what you've done for us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I don't know about the rest of you, but I really hate it when I miss the start of a movie. Yeah?

Often when that happens, I mean, I just don't even bother watching the rest because I can't make head of tail of what's going to happen. Especially when it's a murder show, you know, one of those CSI or bones, where the murder happens in the very first scene.

If you miss that, you just can't work out anything else. Well, the same applies with the Bible. You need to understand the start in order to understand the rest of the Bible.

[1 : 16] And so that's our aim with this new series that we're doing, Genesis 1-11. As we look at it, that's what we want to try and do. Further, if you want to make sense of life, then you have to understand how life started as well.

And that's what we'll do as we look at Genesis 1-3. All the big questions in life about purpose, relationships, belonging, work, all these can be found in the first three chapters.

In fact, many of the hot topics in society today around same-sex marriage, abortion, the environment. Genesis 1-3 has something to say to each of those.

And if you want to understand yourself, human nature, and your purpose in life, then you can't go past Genesis 1-3 either. But of course, many people would scoff at me when I say this today, because they believe that science has disproved Genesis.

The world wasn't created in seven days, they say, and so therefore you can't take Genesis seriously. And because it's such a common view, I actually want to make a few points about that before we dive into the text.

[2 : 29] The first thing I want to say is that as Christians, there's nothing that we need to fear from science. That is, the mind that inspired the Bible is the same mind that is behind the creation of the universe.

And so as the author of both, both the created world and the inspired word, those two things ought to be consistent. Now, of course, tensions arise because what we have is the inspired word, which is fixed, handed down to us, unchanging.

Whereas we have discoveries in science emerging all the time. And as they do, people claim to find conflicts between them. But if we think about it a little, often what happens is that the conflict arises not between science and the text, but actually between science and our interpretation of the text.

Do you see the difference? The text is the one that we have in Hebrew or Greek, in the original, that's inspired. And our interpretation sometimes isn't. It may be right, it may be wrong, but it's not inspired.

At the same time, there are also many people that try to pass off what are merely just calculated guesses and reconstructions as truths in science. So things like the age of the cosmos or the earth, these are just calculations.

[3 : 56] They're deductions. No one, except God, was actually there to measure it at the start of time to observe and then measure time. Well, nevertheless, having said all this, I think science does appear to be pointing to an earth that's older than just a mere addition of all the days and the years in the Bible.

But I want to suggest that if we look closely at the text, there are actually ways of being faithful to the text and yet allowing for the fact of what science seems to be indicating.

So let me give you a couple of examples. First, I want you to notice that the seven-day creation actually does not begin in verse 1, but verse 3. Right? In verse 1, it says, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And then it's only when we get to verse 3 that we have the first day. So I guess the question is, must we insist that verse 1 comes immediately, instantaneously, after verse 1?

Verse 3 comes instantaneously after verse 1. There's nothing in the text that suggests that. And so in that itself, we could account for the age of the cosmos. Second, the English text doesn't actually bring this out, but except for the 6th and the 7th day, all the other days don't actually have the word the in the Hebrew.

[5 : 16] Right? So the definite article isn't there. And to me, that seems to be deliberate because the first five don't have it, but then the 6th and the 7th do. So for example, a more accurate translation of verse 3 could be, and there was evening and there was morning a first day and a second day, etc.

In which case, again, the text allows for time gap between each of those days, between day 1 and day 2, day 2 and day 3. Further, you could also read the descriptions during the day to be in parentheses.

So I put up verse 3, which could be read like this, and God said, let there be light. Pause. Light of the world, yes. Let there be light. Pause.

And then in open brackets, and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day and the darkness night close brackets. And there was evening and there was morning the first day.

That is, everything in the brackets results from what God said, but it doesn't necessarily have to take place in day 1. Everything else may unfold over an indefinite period or undefined period of time.

[6 : 28] So God did create over 6 days by speaking over 6 24 hours days. But what we observe in the fossil records, etc., may have developed over a longer time.

Now, I'm not saying that that's the only way to read it, okay? But it's not a forced reading either. There are actually other placements in the Bible where this is used.

And in the Hebrew and the Greek, there are no punctuations and brackets. and so sometimes it's not clear whether things are in parentheses or not. Okay, anyway, those are a couple of examples and there are others.

But hopefully, what I've managed to show is that it's possible to marry the text with science. And although there are details that still puzzle us and scholars, it's not as inconsistent as skeptics make out to be.

Now, if you want to know more than John Lennox, you know, I invited him for Tuesday, he's coming. No, he's coming on the 8th of August to do a talk exactly on this topic. So, it's in the city.

[7 : 29] Go along to check out more if you want to. I think Jimmy's going, so, you know, he wants to have dinner beforehand with others. But at the end of the day, though, important as these questions are, Genesis is not a science textbook, right?

It wasn't written for this purpose or with that kind of scientific position in mind. Instead, Genesis was written to tell people about God.

God. And so, it was written to be accessible to all. Whatever intellectual capabilities, whatever culture or time period you live in, it has a message for each of us.

So, the Israelite who lived thousands of years ago and the villager in India, for example, today, it has to be understandable by both these people. And the message that comes out from the text has to be the same.

And so, that's how and that's why Genesis was written and is written the way it is. And so, regardless of your own view, personal scientific view on creation, whether it's young or old or how many days there is, God's message to all of us is still the same.

[8 : 39] And the question that the Bible seeks to answer is not how was the world created, but by whom and why. who created the world and why did he do it?

And so, these are the two questions that I want to turn to for the rest of our time today and they're on your outlines. There's actually three, but the second and the third are part of the second. Now, at one level, to answer who is pretty obvious, right?

God did and just to answer that is probably just a very superficial answer. It's like you asking me who I am and me just saying I'm Mark Chu. It doesn't tell you anything about me or maybe it does, but, you know, it shouldn't.

Instead, if you hopefully observe me over a week, then, you know, hopefully you will discover who I truly am, who I am as a husband or a father, how I am as a friend.

And so, that's exactly what happens with Genesis 1. you spend a week with God and we discover what our creator is like, his nature, his character. And the first thing we discover is that he is eternal.

[9 : 49] He sits outside time and space. So, Genesis begins with this grand statement, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God was there in the beginning before time began and he was separate to the material creation.

He is spirit and he is hovering over the waters of the deep. And he creates by the sheer power of his words. You can't miss it, can you? Because each day begins with three words, and God said.

And what he says comes to pass. And it's very different to the other creation accounts that we've seen from the ancient times because in those accounts, what we had were gods fighting and, you know, perhaps it's the blood of one of the gods that, you know, becomes the material from which earth is created or the seed from another god.

And it almost happens as an afterthought. You know, the fight was the main event and creation was just the byproduct. Now, in Genesis, it's totally different, isn't it?

Because God's actions are purposeful. Creation is not accidental and he is the sole actor in this whole drama. There is no conflict and the universe is ruled by one master.

[11 : 01] Everything happens only because of him. And what he creates reveals who he is. He reveals that he is a creative god. But he also reveals that he is an ordered god.

The creation account is actually highly structured as neatly divided into two sets of three days. So you see verse 2, it says, the earth was formless and empty or it was formless and unfilled.

And then God spends the first three days forming and he spends the next three days after that filling. So I've tried to put that on the table to show you.

So in day one, light is formed, separated from the darkness. And then day four, the luminaries, the sun, moon and stars are filling the sky to give it light.

Day two, the sky is formed and separated from the sea. And day five, the sea and the seas, the sky and the seas are filled with creatures, birds and sea creatures. Day three, the dry land is formed.

[12 : 07] And day six, the land is filled with animals, including humans. But within each day, within that order, we also see great creativity as God fills the earth.

So it's not just one kind of plant or animal or sea creature that God creates. But the seas, the skies and the land are teeming with all kinds. And so I joke that actually David Attenborough owes his job and fame to God.

I think he's an atheist, right? But without God, there would be nothing to film for him, right? The Discovery Channel would not exist. And when God speaks, he doesn't just create, he gives purpose as well.

And he does it in two ways. First, by naming things. So he calls day, day, night, sky, land and sea. And by doing that, he marks out boundaries in time and space.

But he also gives purpose by directly speaking. And so in verse 14, where he says that the sun, the moon and the stars are said to be signs, that's their purpose, to mark out the times and seasons.

[13 : 20] And when we get to living things, God goes one step further. He not only gives them purpose, he blesses them as well. So verse 22, so that they can fulfill God's commands by being fruitful and multiplying and filling the waters and the sky.

Now when we get to humans on day six, God cranks it up one more notch, doesn't he? So he blesses us as well, like with the creatures. But then he says that he creates us in his image.

This now is God's pinnacle of creation. So verse 26, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. And then again in verse 27, so God created human, mankind in his own image.

In the image of God, he created them, male and female, he created them. Four times it says that we are being made in God's image. So what does it mean to be made in God's image?

I think it's the most important detail in chapter one. And yet surprisingly, it's not defined, is it? And yet there are clues.

[14 : 27] And I think we can work it out by asking two questions. As we read Genesis 1, we ask, one, what is God like? Because how God is like indicates how we are made in his image.

That's the first question. And the second question is, how are we different from animals? What is God like? And how are we different from animals? So I think our ability to speak, our capacity to reason, our creativity, our consciousness, our ability for relationships, morality, all these things add to making us images of God.

Every human is made in God's image, whether black or white, young or old, male or female. And we don't sort of grow into God's image as if a baby was less of God's image than someone is older.

We all have it on day one. And disability or dementia does not take that away from us. But more importantly, I think we're made like this so that we can fulfill God's purpose.

So you see that, so that, in verse 26, let us make mankind in our image. Why? So that we may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the animals, over all the creatures that move along the ground.

[15 : 53] This is what is called the creation mandate or cultural mandate. And it's our great privilege and responsibility. God gives us the authority to subdue the earth, not in the sense of exploiting it.

Some people read it that way. I don't think so. But actually, by doing what God himself does, bringing order where there is disorder, filling, being fruitful where things, you know, when the earth is empty.

That's what civilization is all about, bringing order, filling, multiplying. So God creates, but we maintain and enhance what he creates with the creativity and the intelligence that he's given us.

We are his agents in this world. But let's remember this, that we are his agents. We are not gods ourselves. We maintain his created order, but we're not free to distort it or reinvent it for ourselves.

This continues to be God's world, not ours. And so I think this is the view that we need to adopt as we think through, for example, the rights and wrongs on things like same-sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering.

[17 : 11] All these things, I think the idea of being made in God's image of order has a big part to play. But let me take this one step further because I want to get to the bottom of why we're here.

Why did God create us in the first place? But by now, I hope you've caught on to the fact that as God moves through the days of creation, what he's doing is sort of putting the building blocks one layer at a time, sort of day by day, block by block.

A bit like this little cute boy. No? Where's that cute boy? That's it, yes. So the first block, and we can go to the pyramid now, the first block is the environment, light, darkness, seasons, water, land, and that enables the next block to be created, plants, so that they can grow.

And then on the block, on top of that, God puts birds and animals which are supported by the plants below it for food. That's what verse 29 and 30 says. God gives the plants to be food for the animals.

And then finally, over that, God creates humans to enable humans to rule over the animals and the sea creatures. So if you look at the pyramid, you can ask, why did God create light and land and all that?

[18 : 34] So that he can create plants to survive. Why did God create plants? Well, to sustain animals in their abundance. And then, why animals? So that humans can rule over them.

It's sort of mind-boggling, doesn't it, if you stop to think about it, because us humans are sitting right there at the top of the pyramid. We now know, of course, that we're no longer at the center of the universe.

We're not even at the center of our own solar system. And yet, we've got a picture here of the sun and the stars at the bottom serving humanity at the top.

Emma's doing a project at the moment. She's doing a project. I'm helping her. I think I'm allowed to do that. And what it is, is to try and create a scale model of the solar system. And so here, she had a sheet that she brought home and I thought, oh yeah, that would be easy.

And then, there was a comparison in the third column which says that if you do it to scale, if the sun is the size of a volleyball, the size of earth is a peppercorn.

[19 : 40] So I was like, okay, so how do I do this now? We've got to, we have to come up with alternate ideas, volleyball, peppercorn. But here we are, puny humans, not even the biggest of mammals, of animals, on this peppercorn at the pinnacle of God's creation.

It's bizarre. It's like, it's mind-boggling, isn't it? And again, during the time of Israel, the nations would have believed otherwise. So Egypt, for example, worshipped the sun.

The sun god, Babylonians, worshipped the stars. But this is not what the Bible says. Just look with me on the screen at Psalm 8, verse 3. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

To which we answer, indeed, what are we? And yet, you have made them, God, you have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

You've made them rulers over the works of your hands, you put everything under their feet, all flocks and herds and animals of the wild, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea, all that swim in the paths of the seas.

[20 : 59] And it's only after the sixth day when God has created humans that he looks on creation and he says that it's not just good but very good. So that's the Bible's view of us.

Humanity is indeed at the top of that pyramid. But I guess the question still remains, why did God create us? Are we really the goal of creation? Every layer of the pyramid supports a layer above it.

So what about us? Who do we serve? And why are we made in God's image? Well, the answer to that question, I think, is found in the New Testament.

And so, there are a few places we could go to, but we'll go to that reading that we had by Marcus in Colossians 1 and verse 15. Well, actually, turn with me if you can. It's page 1162.

1182. Thank you. And so in verse 15, it says, The Son is the image, Son, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

[22 : 05] For in Him, all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things have been created, and this is it, through Him and for Him.

All things, and that includes us, were created for Him, for the Son. And I guess, it's not just that we are created for Him, but we are created the way we are, made in God's image, for Him as well.

And what do I mean by that? What I mean is that we were made in God's image so that Jesus could become human. That is, back at the very start, when God prepared the world, He made it in such a way that one day, in the fullness of time, the perfect image of the invisible God could become a human because we are made in God's image.

We were created to prepare the way for the perfect human. Humans were created to prepare for the perfect human, which is Jesus. And we were given the command to rule so that one day, the earth, to the earth would come a perfect ruler in Christ.

Now, of course, we know that because of sin, Jesus also came in order to reconcile us to God. but reconciliation happens because God actually has a bigger goal in mind.

[23 : 45] And that goal is so that God can come among us to dwell with us. Jesus could become human so that we, Jesus became human so that we can have a relationship with God, the creator with creation.

And because He comes, we can actually see God. We can actually know Him through His Son. And so that's why God also sets aside a seventh day where He rests and where He blesses and makes holy.

Because as the Bible develops, this whole idea of rest is something that God invites us into. To rest in God is to enjoy a relationship with Him, to enjoy creation with Him.

And so it's no coincidence when you look at chapter 2 that on the seventh day, there is actually no evening and there is no morning. It's as if on the sixth day after God has reached His pinnacle of creation, He proceeds then into an eternal plateau, which is the seventh day.

A plateau of rest to which He invites us into. And I'll consider more of that as we look at Genesis 2 next week. But when we turn to the New Testament, this invitation into God's rest is to be found by trusting in Jesus, depending on Him for everything in life.

[25 : 15] So in Matthew 11 and verse 28, Jesus invites us by saying, Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke or burden and you will find rest for your souls.

So my pyramid isn't complete, is it? Because right at the top above humans, there should be Jesus. He is the reason the world was created.

And we are to serve Him as our highest purpose. So it doesn't matter if you're at the top of your field, if you're winning in life, if you're not serving Jesus, then you're not fulfilling your purpose in life, your ultimate purpose in life.

You're falling short of what God's created you for. But on the other hand, if we know Jesus and we know God, then everything we do in life, we do as God's agents in creation.

We do it as part of ruling over the earth, caring for it because God wants us to. To bring order where there is disorder, to sow peace when there is discord, to impart wisdom where there is folly, to shine a light where there is darkness, and helping others to do the same, fulfill their purpose in Christ.

[26 : 32] So, by all means, let's work out the interaction of scripture with signs, but the main message of Genesis is not to be found in that.

Rather, Genesis was written so that we might know who God is and why he's created us, and so that we can, knowing that, serve his son and enjoy a relationship with our creator.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that this is indeed a beautiful creation, and we have only, in one sense, we only know the tip of the iceberg of what you have done.

There are so many things that we think we've discovered, and yet, there's so much more that we don't know. But what we do see and what we do know indeed causes us to say how majestic is your name in all the earth.

how you've created us to be in your image so that your son Jesus can come among us and so that we can see him and know you.

[27 : 40] So help us to cherish our relationship with you. Help us to serve you and serve your son because we have a relationship with you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

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