

God's Very Good Creation

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[0:00] We left verse 2 last week in a state of eager anticipation.! Our world was described as dark, a formless void, uninhabitable, undesirable in every way.

! And it's against this backdrop of a shapeless and empty wilderness that Moses puts God's creative brilliance on display in the rest of the chapter.

It was over that dark and formless void that was hovering the only living and animate being in the entire universe, the Spirit of God hovering in preparation to do something significant and we're left at the end of verse 2 wondering what will he do?

What will it be like? How will he do it? Will it be good? And the answers to those questions come to us here in 3 to 31.

There's a real beauty to the way that Moses wrote this chapter. It's a beauty that isn't always immediately evident in English.

[1:19] The text has a remarkable symmetry and in this case actually brings a depth of meaning that is helpful to our understanding of what's actually happening here, what we're meant to take away from it.

Many scholars have noted that in the Hebrew text, it's uniquely arranged in multiples of seven. Seven often being used in the scriptures to communicate perfection and completion.

And it seems to do that here in Genesis chapter 1 in a number of ways. Most obviously, of course, is that God's work is completed in seven creation days.

Six days of creative action followed by a single day of rest that completes it and a day of enjoyment of the created world.

But it's not just that there are seven days. That would be significant in and of itself perhaps, but it's more than that here in this text. We can look at the opening and closing of the section.

[2:26] There's brackets here. The opening being chapter 1 verses 1 and 2. We studied that last week. The closing section or portion of the section being chapter 2 verses 1 through 3.

And what we find in the Hebrew text is that it's given to us in multiples of seven. Chapter 1 and verse 1, seven Hebrew words. Chapter 1 and verse 2, 14 Hebrew words.

We get to the concluding section. Chapter 2 verses 1 through 3, we find three different statements. All equalling up to 21 Hebrew words.

There's symmetry here. There's bracketing what is taking place here in Genesis chapter 1, intending to communicate perfection, completion. The nouns of verse 1, to take it even further, and we could go even further than this.

God, heavens, earth, all repeated in multiples of seven throughout Genesis chapter 1. Why does that even matter?

[3:29] Why would we even bring that up? Because it's not a coincidence. It's too significant. It's too detailed to be a coincidence in this case. I say all of that to say that what we have here in Genesis chapter 1 is remarkable, amazing literature more than anything else, or as much as anything else.

Moses made great effort to communicate a particular message to us, not only in the words themselves, but in the way that he arranged them in the text.

It's too magnificent to be a coincidence. In beautiful fashion, God used Moses to communicate the story of creation in a way that brings a depth of meaning to God's creative power and order and brilliance, perfection.

Moses is doing something not necessarily historical, strictly speaking, not necessarily scientific, strictly speaking.

He's doing something theological in Genesis chapter 1. He's telling us something about God by conveying brilliantly the real history of creation.

[4:54] But the beauty of the text doesn't necessarily mean that it's myth or legend. In fact, it's distinct from the ancient mythologies and legends of other similar literature from this day and time.

It's distinct in that while it's beautiful, while it has an amazing symmetry to it, Moses still gives it to us in the ordinary narrative prose. He's just telling us what happened.

It's the history of the universe. Why is he doing it? He's doing it in a way that will hopefully increase our faith, but primarily that it will provoke our worship.

That's the intent of the text. Now, the structure of the creation account, of course, it tracks along six creation days. Of course, there's all kinds of debate about the nature of these days, whether we should consider them as six or seven literal 24-hour solar days or as something else.

I just want to say I'm not intending to get into the debate this morning, but just to say over the centuries, two millennia, at least six different dominant views have persisted among Christians, all from Christians that are seriously theologically minded, seriously gospel-focused, wholly committed to the authority and inerrancy of the Bible.

[6:42] All of them. It's possible that these are 24-hour solar days, that that's what we're meant to accept here in the text, though that is not the measure of orthodoxy that some Christians seem to make.

It just isn't. It actually seems to me that Moses was using language here to appropriate God's creative work in a way that is analogical to our solar days, though not necessarily identical to them. But in either case, there are things about Genesis 1 that Christians must believe. The nature of what these days are in their length is not one of those things.

We might liken it to the many discussions that we might have over perhaps the millennial age of Revelation, the end of Revelation. There are things about the end times that we must believe.

We must believe that Jesus is coming back. We must believe that there will be an eternal separation of the righteous and the wicked. We must believe that he will bring a new heavens and a new earth.

[8:02] What you believe about the nature of that millennium is not unimportant, but it's not the most important thing. I think we can look at the nature of these days the same way.

There are things about creation every Christian must believe. We must believe that what is came from God, that he spoke what is out of nothing, that it all comes from his creative power, that he holds it all together, that he does not simply create and then step away and let natural processes take over.

No, he is intimately involved in every part of creation. He is to be worshipped as the creator God. The question of the days is not unimportant.

It's just not the most important. Now, important to the structure of these days is how they're actually arranged. Six days are grouped into two corresponding categories.

Now, think back to verse 2 that we studied last week. We're told that the Spirit of God was hovering over the formless void, emptiness on one hand, shapelessness on the other.

[9:19] And what we find God doing in the rest of the chapter is corresponding to that condition. In the first three days, he's forming. He's forming the earth.

In the second three days, days four to six, he is filling the earth that he has now formed. And there is a unique correspondence between the two groups.

Let me just highlight them for you before we get in. On day one, we find God forming light, separating the light from the darkness.

Corresponding with that is day four. What do we see God doing? Filling. He fills the heavens with the great lights, the sun and the moon and the stars.

What are those things that he's filled the heavens with functioning as? They are governing the light and the darkness that he has shaped and that he has formed in day one. Day two, God is forming the atmosphere.

[10:20] He's separating the waters. On day five, what do we find him doing? As if it's mapping right over top of those first three days. We find on day five, he's now filling the sky with winged creatures, this atmosphere that he has shaped and formed.

And he's filling the seas with marine life that he has shaped and formed on day two. Then we get to day three. God forms dry land.

And in a second creative word, God brings forth vegetation from that land that he has now formed. And then what do we find him doing on day six? Mapping right over top of that. We find him filling the land that he has formed, first in a creative word with land animals. And then in the apex of the creation narrative, we find a second creative word. This time, it's humanity. It's mankind. It's human life. So in the first three, he's forming. He's shaping the formless void. In the second set of days, he is filling what he's now shaped.

[11 : 26] And all of this is to show that Yahweh is a God of power and order. He not only creates all things, but he orders and structures life for optimal flourishing and enjoyment, all for his glory.

He sets boundaries around each facet of the created world so that it functions in exactly the way that it must function.

And it does not rebel. And he does it all through the power of his word. Truly, we come to Genesis 1 and moving forward in our scriptures.

And the only conclusion is there is no God like this God. The purpose of Genesis 1, then, is to exalt the one true creator God to provoke our unending worship.

It's a shame, then, that we can so often spend our time arguing over matters that are peripheral to the text when its intent is to draw us into wonder and amazement at the God who created all that is.

[12 : 43] Moses is informing our minds so that he might then, by the Spirit of God, stir our affections toward this God.

So that our study of Genesis 1 should always conclude with the exclamation of, How great thou art. Let's look first at forming the earth, days 1 to 3. We come to day 1 in verse 3. And God said, Let there be light. And there was light.

And God saw the light that it was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness he called night.

There was evening, and there was morning, the first day. The anticipation of the spirits hovering over the formless void, it now breaks suddenly into creative action.

[13 : 50] And surprisingly to us, unless you've already read it before, which I assume most of you have, if you haven't read it, it's almost a surprise to us. The only instrument of creation, the sole instrument, is God's word.

It's the power of his word. He speaks into the darkness. He speaks into the void. And into it comes forth light.

Let there be light. And there was light. Until day 4, though, there's no created source for the light. What's actually giving the light? What's actually separating the light from the darkness? How could there possibly be an evening and a morning? Those things don't come until day 4. The implication being that God himself is the light shining into the darkness. Interestingly, if you know your Bible well, you will begin to pick up on the fact that the Bible both begins and ends in the same condition.

[14 : 56] An eternal source of light emanating from the Lord God himself. We read in Revelation 22, We read in Revelation 22, than just the bulb that emanates energy so that we might be able to see something in this room.

It's more than that. The light will be represented as an image of knowledge in some cases, as righteousness in other cases, as life and resurrection.

All of these things being summed up in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. It says John in John chapter 1, In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A motif that should not be lost on us right here, at the very beginning, in verse 3.

And then what does God do with it? He speaks the light into existence, and then he separates the light from the darkness. He calls the light, day.

[16 : 41] Day in this case, not being a full day, but daytime. He separates light, daytime, from nighttime. It's the first of several separations that take shape in the chapter.

This particular separation of light and dark, night and day, is essential for forming an inhabitable earth. He's forming.

And Kenneth Matthew suggests that there is more for us to see here than just night and day. Matthew says God leaves a remnant of the darkness each day as both a reminder of what existence would be like apart from God's creative act, a dark void.

It cannot give life to itself. But also a continual reminder of His mercies and how they are new every morning.

[17 : 53] Notice that the ordering of the day doesn't begin with morning as we typically think of. It begins with evening. Why? Well, perhaps it's meant to be a signal to us that just as God spoke light into the darkness, each day, evening and morning, representing His faithfulness, His loving kindness, a sign of His life-giving faithfulness, bringing us through our anxious nights.

Is this not what the psalmist picks up on? We studied it just a few weeks ago in Psalm 30. Weeping may tarry for the night. Joy comes with the morning.

Let there be light. God's forming. He's forming in significant ways. We go to day two. God continues to form. Verse six. And God said, let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters.

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, or you'll see in a footnote probably in your Bible, or sky is the idea here. Not the place where God dwells and sits on His throne, His heavenly court, but literally the sky that we see above us.

[19 : 20] And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. So on day two, God creates the atmosphere that surrounds the earth. He calls it sky, heaven.

And another separation takes place. Did you see it? It's a separation this time of the waters. There are waters that are below the expanse. That would be the waters that are on the earth.

And then there is waters that are in or above the expanse. What is that? Different suggestions have certainly been made.

How would the wandering Israelites in the midst of the wilderness at Sinai understand Moses writing the separation of these waters?

Clouds that contain water, that eventually drop water in the form of dew and rain. That's what God is doing. This is important for us. God is not only forming matter itself.

[20 : 19] He's forming the laws of nature that will govern the world that He created. We have here on day two, water cycles that through scientific investigation now, we fully understand the evaporation of the waters that are on the earth to contain the clouds that are eventually poured out on the earth once again, so that it can sustain itself.

All the work of the creator God, forming, fashioning a world that is no longer shapeless and void, but is glorious.

This is the wonderful care of God who perfectly designed a world that functions in itself to sustain life. Says the psalmist again in Psalm 147, He covers the heavens with clouds.

He prepares rain for the earth. Day three, verse nine. 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 or land or dirt. And the waters that were gathered together, He called seas.

[21 : 39] And God saw that it was good. And God said, let the earth sprout vegetation, two kinds, plants yielding seed, and then fruit trees bearing fruit that has their seed, each according to its kind.

And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, 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. The third day of God forming the earth is unique, at least in this sense.

There's two creative acts here, two creation words here. The first word, verses nine and 10, commands a separation between the waters that are under the earth.

So remember, day two, He separates the waters that are below the expanse from the waters that are in or above the expanse. Now He focuses His attention on the waters that are below. And He separates them, He gathers them into seas and lakes and rivers and what have you, and He separates from those waters the dry land.

[22 : 52] And He names it. He names one the earth, He names the other the seas. And then comes a second creative word. It's on the same day. This one's in 11 to 13.

He calls us the land then to bring forth vegetation that He then separates again into kinds. Again, God is forming not only matter, but the systems that govern life in His world.

He's fashioning, He's shaping, He's forming an inhabitable and desirable world. Amazingly, this vegetation is designed by God to replenish itself.

No doubt as a result of the light from day one and the waters from day two. He's forming, He's fashioning.

Notice, however, there is no mention here of a mother earth. The earth itself is not divine.

[23:59] It does not contain the soul of God. Its fruitfulness does not come as a result of mankind praying toward it, nor does its barrenness come as its displeasure with humanity in the way that humans are then treating it.

This is a polemic for Israel against the pagan deities. Each day, representing a different deity that they would have known, particularly in their time in Egypt.

It's a polemic against them. When they get into Canaan land, they will face this particular dilemma again with the gods that reign in Canaan culture and in Canaan civilization.

Lewd and crude and ridiculous acts of worship that might stimulate Baal and Ashtoreth to somehow bring some kind of fruitfulness to the land of Canaan.

And Moses says right from the beginning, before you get there, you need to know the fertility of the land. It doesn't come from Baal. It doesn't come from Ashtoreth. It doesn't come from Mother Earth. It comes from the creator God.

[25:09] It comes from Yahweh. Yahweh alone. It is God alone who creates and sustains the world in which we live. And the fruitfulness of the earth is under his sovereign control.

God is forming. He's fashioning. And he's reigning over what he forms and fashions. And then we get to the second half.

Three more days are listed here for us. This time God moves from forming to filling. Now there's a distinction between the two. There's different things in some cases that are happening in the filling of the earth.

Let me just highlight them for you before we walk through the days. The first difference is that the creations on days four to six are animate.

They are demonstrating life in a way that is distinct from the vegetation even of day three. There's motion here.

[26:09] We see the repetition of living beings on days five and six in which is the, quote, breath of life. They are living creatures in a way that's distinct from the rest of creation.

But even the celestial bodies of day four, though not living beings in the same sense, give the appearance of animation from the earth, don't they? The perspective of Genesis chapter one is of us standing on the earth and watching all of this happen around us.

As we look up to the sun and to the moon and to the stars, we see motion, right? It's not that they're living beings in the same way. Genesis one doesn't say that they are. But it tracks here, doesn't it? If they're in motion, they're animated in some sense, at least from our perspective. The second difference is that God does not name the things in days four to six with one exception.

Men. Now, why is that important? In the ancient world, naming something communicated authority over the thing named.

[27:17] You know, it's not that God does not exercise authority over the whole of creation, but what we're gonna see happen in chapter two is God delegating the authority of naming to Adam, his image bearer.

However, the image bearer himself remains under the direct sovereign authority of the creator. He is not a God unto himself. A vice regent, we might call him. Imaging God with a delegated authority that he might have dominion over the created world.

There's a third difference though. A final significant change is in the addition of divine blessing, a stated blessing on days five and day six.

A blessing that specifically relates to procreation. God blesses the living creatures with not only the ability, but the responsibility to multiply and to continue to fill the earth that he has now formed.

[28:32] Let's look at day four, verse 14. And God said, let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. Let them be for signs and for seasons, for days and years.

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. Notice he doesn't name them here.

Sun and moon, of course. The greater light to rule the day, the lesser light to rule the night. And then almost as a throwaway statement, and the stars. We'll get to that in a second. God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, to

separate the light from the darkness.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning a fourth day. So corresponding with the forming of light and darkness on day one is the creation of the heavenly bodies that we understand to govern them.

There were two great lights, the sun, the moon, as well as a multitude of stars. Their primary function is to give light, or at least to reflect light.

[29 : 48] But they're also there to aid in navigation, we see. To cause seasonal changes that are necessary for sustained life.

We might pray to the God who created them that this next season would hurry up so we can stop with these 100 degree days in September. They provide a means of charting days and years.

Ian Duggett says the function of these heavenly bodies is carefully limited to providing services to those on earth.

In other words, they are not to be served, they are here to serve us. They have no independent status as deities. The stars which were conceived by many in antiquity to control human destinies are almost an afterthought here.

Although the heavenly lights are good and useful to humanity, there is nothing in their nature that deserves worship and praise, he says. A significant statement to the wandering Israelites in the wilderness having just come from 400 years of captivity in pagan Egypt.

[31 : 03] Loved ones, your life is not governed by the alignment of the planets or the position of the stars. Throw away your horoscopes. It's pagan.

They're all but creations ruled by the God of the Bible who alone is worthy of worship, who alone rules your days. Go to him.

Pray to him. Cling to him. Worship him alone. Day 5, verse 20. And God said, let the water swarm with swarms of living creatures.

Let the birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens. So God created the great sea creatures, 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 and the seas and let birds multiply on the earth. And there was evening and there was morning the fifth day.

[32 : 21] Corresponding to day 2 and the creation of the sky and the separation of the waters are the creatures that are now brought to life on day 5. skulls of fish swarming in the seas and in the waters.

The great sea creatures perhaps even the Leviathan that we read of in other Old Testament texts. The ones that keep me from actually getting in the water when I go to the beach all created here on day 5.

And then he fills the sky, doesn't he? All kinds of bird life, winged creatures, creatures. And again, they're all but creatures who serve the purpose of the creator.

They are not gods themselves. They do not represent gods themselves. And then here is the first statement of blessing, a divine blessing.

God instructs the creatures of the air and the sea to multiply and to fill the respective environments so that the ability to perpetuate life is presented from the very beginning as God's glorious favor, something to be honored, something to be perhaps even pursued, something to be held in high esteem and guarded and protected, a theme that is going to continue all throughout Genesis and the rest of the Bible.

[33 : 47] We're going to see this again and again and again. The blessing of God linked to childbearing. There's a reason we find later in the book of Genesis over and over women in the stories who are barren and they grieve as a result.

This is a blessing from God. The blessing of Isaac, the blessing of Jacob, the blessing of their children is the blessing of God.

It's the favor of God. It's the goodness of God. Day six. 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 beast of the earth according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind and God saw that it was good.

But then he continues another creative word and 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 every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[35 : 22] And here we have a break from narrative prose and we have poetry. So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And another word of blessing.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea. Have dominion over the birds of the heavens.

Have dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth. And God said, behold, I have also given you every green plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth.

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.

[36 : 24] 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.

Like day three, day six has two creative words. Of course, the first one is the creation of animal life, the separation of kinds. There's livestock, the domesticated animals that will be useful to man.

There's the creepy crawlers that I don't know why they're useful to man. They glorify God. There's the wild beast of the earth, all created in the first word, separated.

And then comes the second creative word. More space is given to this part of creation than any other part of the entire chapter, the entire account. Everything in Genesis 1 is pressing forward to this climax of the whole account.

This is the apex of the whole thing. On day six, God crowns his creation with human life, with humanity. We're going to come back to this next week and we're going to look at 26 to 31 on its own.

[37 : 33] But for our study this morning, for its own sake, there's just a couple of things that we should note. That God creates humanity as his own image bearers is of utmost importance in the biblical text, not only here, but moving forward from here.

The inerrant dignity of human life from the womb to the tomb is predicated throughout the scriptures on the fact that human beings are distinct from everything else in God's created world.

We are not a higher form of animal life. We bear the very image of the creator that is to be perpetually communicated to the rest of the universe in the way that we live and in the way that we worship.

We represent him. We image him. We mirror him. And with this image bearing distinction comes the unique privilege in the text of exercising dominion over the created world on God's behalf.

This distinction in human life begins to lay a foundation that is necessary for us to understand the whole point of the Bible, which takes us to one image bearer.

[38 : 56] the person of Jesus Christ, the truest image bearer who will come and redeem fallen humanity from sin and death.

The foundation for the person of Christ is being laid here for us to understand. It's revealed in the Gospels. It's explained in the epistles, Hebrews chapter 1.

He, Jesus, is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power. And after making purifications for sin, he sits down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

This is laying the foundation for us to understand the person of Christ and who he truly is so that we might understand our own salvation from the fallenness that we will find in chapter 3.

We find humanity here is also blessed to enjoy the benefits of what God created the earth to produce for them.

[40 : 01] God sustains them along with land creatures with the vegetation from day 3. This doesn't necessarily demand that all creatures were essentially vegetarians until the fall.

That's not the takeaway here. The takeaway is that God has made the earth and its resources for the good and pleasure of mankind. He has created a world that is pregnant with resources for us to sustain life and to enjoy life.

And he alone does it as the creator of all that exists. David Helm in a sermon on Genesis 1 said this.

The chapter is to make us bow in humble adoration. How it is that we have turned it into a chapter of argumentative wrangling is only an indication of how little we understand the author's intent in writing.

I heard him say that in a sermon and I took out about a thousand words I put in here. It's so true isn't it? Would you just consider for a moment how is it that we're to reflect on Genesis 1?

[41 : 23] What is the real intent of the text here? Would you just consider for a moment how every other biblical author references Genesis 1 and what they're doing?

Interestingly they never engage in disputes over the nature of the days. They never engage in disputes over the sequence of events. They never engage in the compatibility of the text with the finer points of scientific investigation.

That's not what the biblical authors do because they knew that's not what Moses meant for them to do. The point of the text was never to produce that kind of exchange.

Each time creation is referenced in the biblical authors it is to display the glory of God. It is to provoke the reader. It is to provoke the hearer to genuine worship.

You should always walk away from Genesis 1 saying what a God how great thou art. Has it driven you to this kind of worship?

[42 : 31] It's one thing to understand the God of Genesis 1. It's one thing to understand the created world of Genesis 1. It's another thing to actually worship Him. That's what we're meant to do.

Says Psalm 33 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. By the breath of His mouth all their hosts He gathers the waters of the seas as a heap.

He puts the deeps in storehouses. And here's what He says Therefore let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him for He spoke and it came to be He commanded and it stood firm.

That's the intent of Genesis 1. Worship. Hang with me. He controls the rain doesn't He?

We're almost there. the point of the text is to show that the self-existent transcendent creator God needs nothing other than His own will voiced through the breath of His spirit to bring what is into existence.

[43 : 50] And when He speaks His will is perfectly accomplished whether in the creation of a universe or in the new creation of a lost soul that He calls to Himself that is the power of the Word of God.

And it is to show that what God does is very good because He is good. So that when we consider God's very good creation the only right response is wonder and worship and how do we relate that to everyday life now?

I'm going to give you four quick things before we pray. Number one rest in His sovereign power until Jesus returns this earth will keep on spinning.

Its boundaries will be held together. Don't worry about the ice caps. God's in control of that. Rest in it.

Rest in His sovereign power. Number two go in and enjoy what He has made. Enjoy it.

[45 : 14] Enjoy it with the goal of worshiping Him because of it. And I say that as an avid indoors man. let's go enjoy the world He has created for our benefit and for His glory.

Number three trust that the one who made the world will through Christ remake it for His people. He will remake it. He still rules creation. He is the final judge. Every injustice you see now will be judged.

He will do it. You only need trust Him. Number four rest.

Rest. rest in Christ. The word of Genesis 1 made flesh for you.

[46 : 24] Rest in Him. Trust Him. Believe Him. Worship Him.

the God who made it all. Let's pray.