

This created world

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[0 : 00] Okay, with Genesis 1 open in front of us, I'd love you to follow along and notice things with me. Here's my question to when we begin. When you open your eyes to the world around, what do you see? What do you make of it? This natural world in which we live?

Walk outside this morning, not right now, but in 20, 30 minutes time, walk outside this morning and take in the large Cambridgeshire sky reaching over you.

Notice the wispy clouds and the birds high up and the clarity of the light. Shut your eyes maybe as you walk and sense on your skin the cold and the wind autumn is coming and smell the air and breathe in and breathe out.

What is this world we live in?

What is this world we live in from? This rich full Earth. Is it designed or is it by chance? Or look at your body in the mirror. Try to see through the skin to muscle and kidney and beating heart and the complexity of your eyeballs and all of it working in harmony and you alive looking at yourself, breathing, thinking, remembering, worrying.

[1 : 46] Is this good or is it bad? Or are we going to say that the whole thing just is? It just is. When you open your eyes to the world around you, what do you see?

There's a man called Peter Atkins. He's a well-known chemist and writer. He has no time for God and he believes somehow that science can deal with every aspect of existence. Quote, all the extraordinary, wonderful richness of the world can be expressed as growth from the dunghill of purposeless interconnected corruption.

There's a lot of big words there. The whole thing, purposeless growth from a heap of muck. That is a very, very miserable view of life.

And, says Genesis 1, it is absolutely, utterly, stunningly wrong. These first chapters in the Bible, Genesis, God-given and for us, we've said this this past couple of weeks, they take us back to the very beginning, to the foundations of our existence and our world.

And they are given here for us to teach us truth and to shape our view of all of life. And so far, the past couple of Sundays, we've come from Genesis 1, verse 1, where in the beginning, the eternal, uncreated God, out of his imagination and choice, he created the heavens and the earth.

[3 : 14] The whole space-time universe in which we live, he made it. It's a claim that injects the whole of reality with purpose and meaning. We went further last Sunday, noticing that our creator is the God of awesome speaking power.

He brings good order from chaos. He's the one and only God before whom we should bow. Next this morning, we're moving slowly.

I want us to move from the creator to his creation itself, this created world. And five things this morning to say from the text of Genesis 1.

Five points to shape our understanding of this world at a very, very foundational level. Here's the verse. First of all, we live in a creation ordered by God.

We touched on this last week. That is, our environment, this world, is shaped, set, firm and regular and ordered by our creator.

[4 : 25] With the text open in front of us, do you remember we noticed last Sunday how back in verse 2, before God speaks, the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

It's a picture of maybe danger, certainly mystery. A seething watery mass wrapped in darkness, no place for life or for us.

And then very deliberately, God speaks and commands and he brings order. Creates light, verse 3. Then separates it from the darkness.

On day 2, in verse 6, he makes a vault like a hammered out mirror, a tent canvas, cast over us to separate the waters beneath from the waters above.

He calls the vault sky as he opens up a safe, protected place for us. On day 3, verses 9 and 10, he gathers the waters under the sky to one place and makes dry ground appear.

[5 : 32] By his command, a place for us to stand on. We looked last week at this, I'm calling this, a biblical picture of creation.

Maybe you can't quite see here. No watery chaos enveloping us now. Rather, in our world, there are boundaries and order and that is good.

And we should recognise this. God's ordering of creation. You and I sit in a building here on dry land and we're on the last sticky up bit of earth on the edge of Europe.

And to our west, just beyond Ireland, is the Atlantic Ocean. There's two to three miles deep of water west of here. And yet for us, as we meet here this morning, life is solid and safe.

Why is that? You can give different answers. You might say, if you want to, I think this is probably right, it's to do with air pressure and gravity and the amount of water and the tides and the temperature and so on.

[6 : 38] That's why we're not completely submerged. And you go, yes, from one angle, that's how it happens. But why are things set like this? Psalm 104, reflecting on Genesis 1, puts it so poetically and wonderfully.

Psalm 104, saying, He set the earth on its foundations. It can never be moved. You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment. The waters stood above the mountains.

But at your rebuke, the waters fled. At the sound of your thunder, they took to flight. They flowed down over the mountains, went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them.

You set a boundary they cannot cross. Never again will they cover the earth. That is, do you think this is sort of fairy story stuff? The Atlantic Ocean, ordered by his kingly word, stay there.

That's why it happened. That's why we're not submerged. We need to hear that. Like geology and geography and the study of weather, often makes no mention of God.

[7 : 49] And so you fall into imagining that the way our world is just happens through chance, or nature with a capital N. Say, no, no, no.

The earth and the seas are set by our good creator. Sea levels, you might know, have risen about 25 centimetres since 1880.

Is there anything we can do as humanity to influence the levels of the sea? There may be. But don't proudly think it all depends on us.

No, sky and sea and land, days two and three here, ordered and set by the sovereign Lord. More than that, just moving on in the text, do you notice how creation runs in a regular, firm way?

Through Genesis 1, there is evening and morning, and evening and morning. In verse 12, on the third day, the land produces vegetation.

[8 : 59] Plants bearing seed according to their kinds, and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. That is, if you plant an apple seed, you will get an apple tree.

Always. That's set. On day four, God sets the sun and the moon in the sky. Why? Middle of verse 14, to serve as signs, to mark sacred times and days and years.

The sun and the moon are like giant clocks, rising and falling, marking the times and the seasons regularly. It's kind of obvious, but maybe we take for granted the daily rhythm of sun rising and setting as the earth rotates regularly.

Or think of the seasons. Fading light and falling leaves and reds and browns in autumn, icy crispness and dark in winter, the first warmth on your face in March, buds and blossom through to the long days of summer.

You can plan your year around that. It will happen. This creation order set and regular.

[10 : 14] That is so good for us and are flourishing. And by the way, in brackets, the fact that our creation is ordered and constant is what makes science doable.

like you can investigate, you can uncover the laws of nature. You can describe the world with maths. You can make predictions.

You can discover the how of God's regular ordering of creation. That's why Johannes Kepler, German astronomer, described science as thinking God's thoughts after him.

There's a laboratory in Cambridge which has the words, a science laboratory, has words from Psalm 111 above the door. Great are the works of the Lord studied by all who delight in them.

This created order, ordered by God. So good that. Second, let's go on and touch more quickly. We live not just in a creation ordered, but a fruitful and teeming creation.

[11 : 24] Did you notice that as Naomi read? Not an empty shell, our world, but fruitful and teeming and alive. It starts in verse 11 in the middle of day three when God said, let the land produce vegetation.

And so you're meant to picture bare ground like a gym floor and then sprouting up and shooting forth vegetation everywhere. Seed bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it according to their various kinds.

And it was so. Talking about flowers and wheat and cabbage plants and vines and orange trees and giant redwoods and all of them with seed in them.

You see that? This is obvious to lots of us, but God's generative power within so that they can spread their seeds and flourish as you take up one of those flowery things and spread the seed. This extravagant diversity of vegetation around us. You notice it all around. If you go down to the botanic gardens in town, it's free for under-sixteens, £8.50 for adults.

[12 : 34] You can see it all displayed according to their kinds. Tree after tree after tree, different with pictures and notices. There's a cedar of Lebanon there.

You can't even get your hands halfway around this trunk, gnarled and ancient with a massive canopy above. On day three then, a fruitful land of plants and trees that will give us conkers and bread and carrots and wine and so on.

On day four, verses 14 to 19, God fills the sky above. And end of 16, in that passing comment, he also made stars, all 100 billion in the Milky Way and then multiply up and up.

On the fifth day, verse 20, we're back with the waters and the skies and God said, let the water team with living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.

So no empty oceans then. Verse 21, God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it according to their kinds.

[13 : 49] Can you picture it? As you kind of look down into the ocean, the wriggling and the teeming of plankton and herrings and jellyfish and seahorses and dolphins and manta rays and the great creatures of the deep, maybe the saltwater crocodile, the monsters of the deep, some of which we don't see.

And then, end of verse 21, every winged bird according to its kind, the pigeon with its homing instinct, the bat with its echolocator system, the woodpecker with its extra neck muscles.

And in verse 22, God addresses them and blesses them, be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas and let the birds increase on the earth. Do you see? And then, verse 24, God said, let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds, the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground and the wild animals, each according to its kind.

And it was so. Domestic animals, small animals, wild animals, swarming, grazing, crawling, hunting, everywhere you look. It's not quite exactly what the text is saying here or the implication, but pity the adults and the children glued to their phones, don't you think?

Staring dumbly at a screen, hoping for something interesting or distracting. I'm speaking to myself. Really, it's funny how sometimes we close our eyes to the abundance of life around us or get bored by what God took delight in making.

[15 : 30] Genesis 1 is painting this true picture for us up above and around and everywhere. Look, his creation teeming and fruitful, filled with complex, varied life.

What do you see as you look around? This created world, ordered by God, fruitful and teeming, next here in the text, very straightforwardly, his creation is good, is good.

It's simple to say, but so important. Seven times in Genesis 1 we're told this, on purpose. So back in verses 3 and 4, God said, let there be light and there was light and God saw that the light was good.

The end of verse 10, having ordered the waters and made the land appear, God saw that it was good. And vegetation, sun and moon, fish, birds, animals, all of it good.

And we'll get there eventually. At the end of day 6, having created humanity as well, in verse 31, God saw all that he has made and it was very good. So this is God as artist and creator, standing back and evaluating what he's made and done.

[16 : 46] And he's pleased. It's good. means this created order, the lot of it, is exactly as he plans and satisfies his purpose.

He looks and he says, I approve, it's good, it's beautiful, it's right, it's just what I wanted. Here's a question. Do you believe that? Like of course we live today in a world that is created and at the same time fallen and marred and twisted out of joint and bad happens in this world. Yet that notwithstanding, this ordered, teeming, full of life creation remains good. This is good, that is good. Maybe that's obvious to us.

I think for many people it's not. Some religions teach that the physical world is evil. you've got to escape it and rise above it.

And there can be a strain of bad Christian teaching like that. You should not sit down and have a feast. And why are you bothering to watch that sunset when you could be telling people about Jesus?

[18:04] And don't waste your time walking in the fields and bodies are dirty and you've got to rise above all that creation stuff and focus on heaven. God sees everything he's made and it is good.

He rejoices in his works and so should we. The apostle Paul will say in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 4 everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it's received with thanksgiving. Okay, where are we up to? In the text of Genesis 1 here then creation this all of it ordered and fruitful and teeming and good.

But there is still more to say because actually it is possible to see how complex and rich and beautiful the creation is and yet still miss the most important thing.

I don't know if you've watched any of the David Attenborough nature documentaries on iPlayer or Amazon Prime or Boxset. He's done Blue Planet there we go Ocean Going Creature and Planet Earth and Frozen Planet these like high definition just stunning documentaries about marine life and the planet and polar wildlife hugely popular riveting actually if you watch them.

[19:39] I read a review of Frozen Planet and this is what the reviewer wrote in the paper. This series is curiously soothing. Sir David Attenborough has remarked about the great comfort of nature.

In moments of deep grief the only consolation you can find is in the natural world he told Radio Times. People write to me and tell me this people of great distinction when so and so died the only thing that made life tolerable was to watch programs on plants and animals and I thought that's true for me yes because we're part of a big enduring thing and I think you want to say to David Attenborough here yes almost go on and Janice Turner goes on about nature programs they transport us beyond our own species we are freed for a moment from thinking about ourselves yes go on quote and frozen planet is all that it's lush it's expansive it reveals fresh wonderment in every snowflake and every surfacing whale it makes us feel both microscopically insignificant and part of a mighty unfathomable plan you think

Janice you've almost got it as in if you look around at creation and the animals and the seas and you see how good it is it does make us feel part of a mighty unfathomable plan because we are part of a mighty unfathomable plan and that is because creation fourthly displays God's glory to us it's not stated explicitly in Genesis 1 it comes later in the Bible this looking back look at these verses Psalm 19 verse 1 the heavens declare the glory of God Romans 1 verse 20 since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made you see as you and I come off our phones and look around and breathe in and drink in the glories of this created stable fertile world it should and must turn us upwards to the glories of our creator our

Lord and our God the movement of sun and moon the rhythm of the seasons every flower the wheat the redwood herrings jellyfish woodpecker giraffe such complexity and variety and beauty in a world that works and all of this all of this is his works John Calvin a Christian minister of hundreds of years ago said wherever you cast your eyes there is not a spot in the universe where you cannot see at least some sparks of his glory wherever you look up to the skies in the sea in the flower bed at your body what imagination to come up with this what eternal power to do all this what love to set this world in this way what are you going to say about all that all the extraordinary wonderful richness of the world can be expressed as growth from the dunghill of purposeless interconnected corruption no ordered and secure teeming and good we live in a theatre which displays to us the glory of our good creator and we should worship him for it one final point which will take us into next week and it's this here in genesis 1 this created universe all of it is for us it is for human beings like you and me you see genesis 1 to this point we've not yet got to the creation of humanity is slanted towards us god separates light and darkness he separates the waters and makes the sky he

gathers the waters below into one place so that land will appear a place where we can stand and breathe safely the depths of the universe which dwarf our pinprick of a planet receive only a mention in verse 16 he also made the stars there's not much here for the astronomer and the space scientist rather the focus is earth our home plants we're told have seed in and bear fruit which will be for us to eat sun and moon serve to mark sacred times and days and years for us land animals are categorised according to their usefulness for us livestock yes you can eat them wild animals don't go near them and the whole creation account we have not yet quite got there is moving towards day six the climax verse 26 onwards when having set the stage if you like

God will say let us make mankind in our image that is he makes all of it enormous and complex with us in his sights with humanity at the centre of all his creation plans this eternal uncreated God isn't that remarkable creation for us and very last comment God if he has made all of this with us in mind what do you think this God would do if we screwed up our place in creation if as his tiny creatures we sinned against him if the relationship between him and his creation was torn and ruptured what do you think he would do this is Carl Sagan astronomer our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic darkness in all this vastness there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves it's not true for as we'll discover as we continue to

[26 : 22] Genesis 2 all the way through to Revelation 21 and many of us know the one who creates all things for us steps into his creation and comes to us God the living creator will become God the dying savior for you and for me that he might make us new creatures and prepare us for a restored and perfect creation a future new heaven and a new earth that is even better and greater than the first creation isn't that so wonderfully good not make believe not spinning words this is the truth of how things are for us for tiny human beings like us in the center of this ordered teeming good creation with a

God over us let me lead us in a prayer and then we're going to sing together Almighty God we read in the Bible that your eternal nature and divine power are clearly seen through what has been made so hard for us to remove ourselves from immediate worries and concerns and look up and look around but your word teaches us we praise you for this so complex unfathomable ordered secure good teeming world in which you place us we are not accidents this is no mistake without purpose but your world you are our creator we live and breathe in your creation held by you please would you help these truths spoken now to go down deep into us and shape us and form us that we might not only worship you day by day as our creator with our eyes open to the richness of your world but might also trust you as the creator who is also our redeemer and saviour we pray in Jesus name amen