

The Creator

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[0 : 00] Alan, thank you. So keeping Genesis 1 open in front of us, I want to say just straight up front that deep down life does not have to be miserable.! And it shouldn't be.

We began a series in Genesis chapters 1 to 4 last Sunday by mentioning Woody Allen, who you may know, elderly American filmmaker and brutally honest atheist.

Atheist, quote Woody Allen, there is no God, there is no magic, there is nothing other than the cold hard facts of what you see with your eyes.

It begins, it ends, there is no reason for anything and that's that. And therefore he says, quote, our seemingly busy, busy lives ultimately mean nothing in this cruel and hostile universe.

Like you can believe that there is no God and be much more upbeat than Woody Allen. Many people are. But actually what he says does make sense, does it not?

[0 : 59] Because if there is no God, if there is no designer, then there is no real reason or purpose for anything. That is, on this tiny pinprick of a planet, you exist by chance.

You're just compacted space dust, you're an accident of nature. You have no given worth as a person. Your seemingly important life flickers for a while, then fades.

And once your body rots away, no one will remember or care in this cruel, hostile, random, accidental universe. If that is true, that is miserable at the deepest level.

And the Bible says to us that this worldview, this belief system is utterly, utterly wrong.

We've just read from Genesis 1. Genesis 1, open in front of us, takes us back to the beginning and declares to us truly the foundations of existence. Here are the questions.

[2 : 00] Where do we, where does this world really come from? Who really are we as human beings? What are we here for? Last week, the first Sunday in this series, just Genesis 1, verse 1.

In the beginning, God, that is, above us, outside of us, and beyond created reality, is God. Father, Son, and Spirit, uncreated, unbounded, eternal.

And this God, out of his imagination and wisdom and will, freely acts. Because in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

That is, everything you and I see, everything we don't see, this whole organised space-time universe is created by the unseen, out of creation, God.

Genesis 1, verse 1, is a headline claim, which injects our world and us with God-given purpose and significance and worth. With Genesis 1, verse 1 in mind, now this morning we're going to move on and see Genesis describing for us the creating work of God, what he does.

[3 : 19] Pause a second. Before we go further in Genesis 1, we must recognise that this chapter here has for many years come under fire and been dismissed as primitive and simply untrue.

I guess you feel that ringing in your ears. There's no mention here of a big bang. Or dinosaurs. No mention of millions upon millions of years of evolutionary processes, unguided or guided.

There is none of that here. And so, popular culture says, Genesis 1 surely belongs to the flat earth, eyes-shut, religious weirdo brigade. To which, at this point, I just want to simply say a couple of things.

First, we must listen carefully to what the Bible, the Word of God, has to say here. And we should allow Genesis 1 to instruct us on its own terms.

Second, as we do that, don't desperately try to fit Genesis 1 around supposedly scientific observations and theory.

[4 : 25] There's all sorts of stuff we can say that's beyond my expertise about the Bible and science and evolution and so on.

She and I have mentioned this during the week, but I hope in the next week or two or three, we're going to have an opportunity to talk about that together. And Emma's going to help us with that. But

up front this morning, just know this.

Genesis 1 is given here by God to teach us, to teach us what's true, and to shape us. And there is nothing to be ashamed of here.

Nothing to worry about defending. Quite the opposite, in fact. Okay, more on that coming, but let's get into it. Look at the text with me. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Now verse 2. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

[5 : 27] Do you see those verses? So if verse 1 describes a first-off act of creation, he created the heavens, the unseen world of powers and angels in the heavenly throne room, and he created the earth, this visible creation, then verse 2 now takes us there to the earth.

And what you see there is dark and chaotic. Do you see in the verse? The earth formless and empty and darkness over the surface of the deep.

Artist's impression on the screen there. Verse 2 is our world, quote from one writer, not yet having been shaped. There's no light, no life, no organic creature, no form and configuration in things.

Rather, we see a seething, watery mass that is wrapped in darkness. It's what you read here in verse 2. Maybe there's danger here.

Mystery, certainly. Something is about to happen. Because, do you see, the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. There's potential, there's expectation.

[6 : 41] And now we come to verse 3, so famously, where God said, let there be light, and there was light. Three things I'd love us to see this morning from Genesis 1 about God.

God. Because the driving force in this account and the driving force in the whole of reality is not Mother Nature. It's not some impersonal power.

It is God who dominates. The personal, speaking, good God. And these verses show us, firstly, he is the God of sovereign power.

That is, he speaks a word of command, and it is so. And verse 3 is so simply put, it's very familiar. And God said, let there be light, and there was light. Years ago now, it was years ago, I was sitting in my study, I heard a voice from the bathroom.

[7 : 46] The bath had water in it, the water was sloshing, and there was a little voice that went, be still. It was an experiment in the bath by a curious child.

I shouted through, did it work? The answer was no. Of course not. But the point is here that when the almighty, eternal God commands, it happens.

Not bath water, but the whole created order. Verse 3, and there was light, exactly as he'd commanded, the universe was lit up.

You've got to notice this, this irresistible speech, it runs right through Genesis 1. Do you see this? Verse 6, the start of the second day, and God said, let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.

So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it, and it was so. Verse 9, day 3, and God said, let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear, and it was so.

[8 : 54] So ask, why do we stand now on dry land in England with the Atlantic Ocean held in its place? because he commanded, and it was so.

At verse 11, God said, let the land produce vegetation, seed bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it according to the various kinds, and it was so. Verse 14, day 4, and God said, let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, let them serve as signs to mark sacred times and days and years, and so on, and it was so, and so on, and so on through this account.

Let there be sea creatures, birds, livestock, and it was so, and from the dust creatures were made. Everything you see, this is a driving idea in Genesis 1, is the product of his word.

He imagines, he decides, he speaks, and by speaking, he irresistibly, powerfully creates. Just notice a second thing.

Next, coming back to verse 3, having spoken, God continues to exert absolute control. And God said, let there be light, and there was light.

[10 : 07] Next, God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. And then, God called the light day, and the darkness, he called night.

As creator, he acts as the God of sovereign speaking power. Okay, first thing this morning. As you and I live in this created order, because this isn't a story from elsewhere, this is us here, this is the whole of reality, with skies above and ground beneath, we need to get hold of this.

One danger of talking lots about nature, or the process by which things might evolve, and so on, you start to imagine that this world just is by itself, don't you?

Or if there is a God, he's far away and uninvolved and small, and he doesn't matter. But that is not how it is. It's a lie, that.

Sometimes it's a convenient lie to push God away. Listen to this. It's from a book called Notes from the Merry-Go-Round, Wide-Eyed Wonder in God's Spoken World.

[11 : 27] It's a bit flowery, but just listen to this. I look around at the stuff of the world and I ask myself, what is it made of? Words. Magic words.

Words spoken by the infinite, words so powerful that they have weight and mass and flavour. You are spoken into being. I am spoken. We stand on a spoken stage, the spinning kind, the round kind, the moist kind, the kind of stage with beetles and laughter and babies and dirt and snow and fresh-cut cedar.

You are made of cells. I am made of cells. My cells are built on molecules. My molecules make use of atoms. My atoms are mostly space, but the bits that aren't are called quarks.

My quarks are standing because they are obedient. They've been told to by a voice they cannot disobey. Do you get the sense of that?

This is the truth of reality. The very smallest elementary particles at the beginning of creation and this very second are obedient to the voice.

[12 : 39] They have been spoken into existence. It all stands at his command. This God of immense sovereign power.

Do you believe that? Here's the second thing. In these early verses, Genesis 1, he is next the God who brings good order from chaos.

That is, God forms a shaped, set, flourishing creation which is good. You're meant to sense that firstly in the way that Genesis 1 is written.

Did you notice when Alan read, it's a very carefully shaped, poetic account. There's order to it and purpose. We're told of seven days. Verse 1 in the original language has seven words.

Verse 2 on purpose 14 words, seven times two. God is mentioned 35 times, seven times five. I had to look that up. I mean, someone told me that, but it's true.

[13 : 48] And each day of creation follows a rhythm. God said, it was so. God saw, God called, there was evening, there was morning, tight, precise, ordered, reflecting in its style what God himself makes.

Back in verse 2, before God speaks, the earth was formless and empty, an unshaped, dark mass, not a place for us to live. And very carefully in the six days of creation here, God, by speaking, transforms forms this formless, empty earth and brings order.

There's a little table here on the handout and up on the screen here that shows what God does on each day. Let me just leave that up as we speak it through.

On the first three days, he brings form and structure to the earth, light and sky and sea and land. And on days four to six, the emptiness is filled.

Just follow it through with me a touch in the text. In verse 2, this seething, watery mass wrapped in darkness, it won't support life, it won't support you and me, but on day one, verses 3 to 5, light.

[15 : 05] And we talk about the darkness of death, of depression as a stubborn darkness of someone coming into the light. God creates light, sees that it's good and brings order.

He separated the light from the darkness called the light day and the darkness he called night. And you think, quite what that means, given that the sun, our marker of day and night, our source of light only appears on day four.

It's not crystal clear what this means. But he does bring light in the watery darkness. That's good.

Next day two, God said, let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.

And this vault, it's the idea of something stretched and flattened out like a hammered out mirror, a tent canvas over us.

So God made the vault like a hard shell surface over the earth and separated the water under from the water above and it was so.

[16:13] And so step outside this morning and look up and you see it, this shell. Verse eight, God called the vault sky. We know there's no hard shell all the way over.

You won't bang your head if you go up and up and God knows that too. And yet right now, we're not drowning in seething waters. There are waters beneath that flow up from the earth.

There are waters above. The floodgates of the heavens can open and pour down on us, especially in Britain. But God has brought order. He separated the waters under from the waters above.

He's opened up a safe, protected space by his mighty power. There was evening and morning the second day. Day three arrives and he continues to form his world.

Verse nine, God said, let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear. And it was so. Can you imagine this moment? Psalm 104 describes it beautifully.

[17:17] At your rebuke, the waters fled. At the sound of your thunder, they took to flight. They flowed over the mountains. They went down into the valleys to the place you assigned for them.

Get in your place, God commands, and stay. And the waters gather, go down. They're held in place by his word and dry ground appears.

God called the dry ground land and the gathered waters he called seas and God saw that it was good. Do you see what's taking place here in Genesis 1? From watery, shapeless, dark chaos to well, something like this.

This biblical picture of creation. This is our world. The world we inhabit now. The New Testament says, out of water the earth was formed.

There is light and darkness now in our world. There's a vault sky above us. The waters are held above and below. There is dry ground, earth, for us to stand on.

[18:26] Watery chaos has been mastered and ordered. And now there are boundaries, there's safety, there's a good creation which can be filled and adorned with flourishing life.

More on that next week but we'll get on to this. God then goes on in days three and four and six to make vegetation and lights in the sky and creatures in the water and the sky and livestock and humans.

He makes a place teeming with life and beauty. We've said lots there. Here we sit this morning ask the question what's behind all this?

Who's behind this world? This world of ours where you sit this morning breathing and safe and alive. The sovereign God.

He is the God of awesome sovereign power. He's the God who brings good order from chaos. Last thing for this morning this powerful creator thirdly briefly is the one and only God.

[19:40] Less so in our western world today but certainly in folk religion through the ages and in the ancient world there is a belief to you know this in a whole array of gods. There are divine beings everywhere whom you must please and suck up to.

In the ancient world people looked up and around in fear and confusion. They worshipped the sun and the moon. They were tugged between different gods feeling their destiny controlled by the stars these silent lights shining down on them.

What fate will my horoscope decree? To which in part Genesis 1 speaks with biting relevance. On day 4 verse 14 God said let there be lights in the vault of the sky I will create them myself and here's the job I give them to separate the day from the night and serve as signs to mark sacred times and it was so.

And so verse 16 God made two great lights the greater light to govern the day the lesser light to govern the night you don't need to know their names really those two great lights they're nothing special.

Oh and by the way and maybe this is the best throwaway line of Genesis 1 what did God also make? He also made the stars like a hundred billion in the Milky Way and then multiply up and up and up to ten to the twenty four whatever that means one with twenty four zeros after it maybe that many stars he just made them and the point is here in the text there are no rival gods to worship or worry about the sun god the moon god they're his creations they do his bidding the stars he made them don't bother reading your horoscope and thinking you're going to discover something about your future and we're making our way slowly in and through Genesis 1 this morning just part of it I'm asked at the beginning where where do we where does our world really come from?

[21:55] such an important question what will we believe? when you you don't need to step outside you can look out and look around and feel the ground beneath your feet and see the plants

and the animals and take a breath and sense the life in you and maybe know that this year you're thirty or forty or fifty or sixty and your relationships go up and down and you wonder what life's about and you're going to die and what's the whole point?

do I come from anything? Genesis 1 speaks to the ancient world to a world of many gods a place of fear and ignorance Genesis 1 speaks to the modern world a world many say of no god a place of seeming confidence and knowledge and the message of these verses is very bold and very good we are not the product of impersonal nature nor of many gods but in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth he did it the God the God of sovereign speaking power the God who brings good order from chaos the one and only God who is alive today you and I have a creator above and beyond us he is utterly supreme he is personal involved immense and he's created and set and secured this world for us therefore well almost everything but just one thing this morning therefore so what therefore bow before this creator

God one final slide look at these words from Psalm 33 a touch later in the Bible which tell us how to be and respond by the word of the Lord the heavens were made their starry host by the breath of his mouth he gathers the waters of the sea into jars he puts the deep into storehouses that's Genesis 1 so let all the earth fear the Lord let all the people of the world revere him for he spoke and it came to be he commanded and it stood firm that's what we're meant to do now adults and children and teenagers this is how we're meant to live we don't need to live with the directionlessness and misery of Woody Allen there is no God there is no magic our lives mean nothing in this cruel and hostile universe no no instead as tiny creatures in a created universe grasping just something of the power and goodness of this one creator in whose grip we're held fear the Lord stand in awe of him tremble a little at his majesty bow before him and then go on and know that this awesome creator of all is the Lord he's the personal

God who shares his name with us and even sends his son into his world for us because the one through whom the father made the world God the son was sent by his father into the world to be the saviour of the world so that through the life and death and resurrection of this God man Jesus you and I as creatures might know the creator of all as our friend and our father I want to say that is the complete opposite of the misery that Woody Allen is talking about how stunning you could not make it up could you a creator who made us who loved us who sent his son that we might know him as our God well let me lead us in a prayer let's pray together let all the earth fear the Lord let all the people of the world revere him for he spoke and it came to be he commanded and it stood firm our Lord and our God you who sit enthroned above and outside this creation we praise you for your sovereign power and your order in goodness you are the one who by your word made the heavens and the earth you spoke all things into existence we your creatures stand and sit this morning in your world stable and safe for this is your world and you are our God please continue to teach us through Genesis 1 please shape us and form us and make us creatures who fear you and also love you you are creator and redeemer we ask in Jesus name

Amen who