

In the beginning

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[0 : 00] Thank you for reading. Would you agree with me about this, that if there is no creator, if there is no God, do you not think life would be very, very sad?

! Very desperate. This chap here you might recognise is Woody Allen, who is a fantastic filmmaker and a very honest and straight-talking believer in no God.

And he is unafraid to face up to what is true, his truth. Quote, 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. Like it is possible, when you believe that there is no God, to give life a real positive go. Get busy, work hard, try to do good, care for people genuinely, take pleasure where you can.

I don't think you're ever driving along in the car and you see these bumper stickers on the back of your Land Rover, one life, live it! And yet when you stop, or you're forced to stop driving a Land Rover or living hard, and you ask, what am I actually doing?

[1 : 27] Why am I here? Why am I here? What's it for? That is pretty tough to answer, if there is no creator God. Like as a grown-up or a child, if you can, ask the biggest questions. Where do we come from?

Well, this universe has come into being by luck, I guess. There's no design, it's just an accident and here we are. Or who are we as human beings? Well, I guess we're just space dust, and somehow there was a spark of life and we evolved by chance out of the swamps, maybe.

Well, what are we here for? You think, well, who knows? In fact, what do you mean, what are we here for? There's no purpose to living. We're a freak of nature. Somehow we live for the moment in a tough and messed up world, and then we die.

And if life is like that, if there is no creator, if there is no God, then here's Ruby Allen again, brutally. Our seemingly busy, busy lives ultimately mean nothing in this cruel and hostile universe.

That is, you're born and you have fun as a kid, and you grow up and you do stuff, and maybe you fall in love and fall out of love, and there's decisions and stress and it feels really important, except it's not.

[2 : 52] Because you exist by chance. You have no worth. Your life flickers for a while and then fades. There's no purpose to living, no reason, no significance.

So once your body rots away, no one will remember or care in this random, cruel, uncaring universe. That's what Woody Allen sees.

Like, that is desperately miserable, you know? Your life in front of you, a directionless void, unless you realise that Woody Allen is wrong.

It's not right. What we're doing this September as a church is we're going to go back to the beginning. We're going back to the beginning of the Bible and the beginning of everything. Genesis chapter 1, which tells us the foundations of our existence.

Where does this world really come from? Who really are we as human beings? What are we here for? And this ancient chapter in this old book declares and claims answers to those questions and gives us a really different view of the world.

[4 : 05] I'm not going to say anything this morning about the authorship of Genesis, where it comes from. I'm not going to say anything about science and Genesis and how there's nothing embarrassing here and we can have real confidence in these words.

I'll just say up front that what we find in Genesis about God and our world and us is solid and true and good and wonderful.

Genesis 1 will make sense of us as children and adults, our world and our experience. And what I've been praying this past couple of weeks is that these foundations here in the Bible that we look

at over this coming month or two might shape us very, very deeply for good and will grow in us an unashamed, joyful confidence in living for our God and knowing Him.

So this morning, with us all together, just one verse. Are you ready? Genesis 1, verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

There's not a massive problem to help us, but I'd just love some of us to come out and sit here with these most important things. This is someone who needs to be a child or an adult. Would you like to come and sit here and put this on their knees?

[5 : 26] Emily, thank you. Well done, Peter. Just sit here and just hold this for us so we can see it and not miss what it says right at the start of Genesis 1. Did you know this? We live in a universe and a story with a beginning.

Smaller children, you might not know this, but adults might. Many scientists used to think that our world always existed in a steady state. No first moment ever.

Slightly differently, in some eastern religions, there's a sense of time just going round and round and round. There's no real beginning.

There's no end. Here in Genesis 1, there is a beginning. There's a beginning of space and time and everything. There's a beginning.

And then history moves forward in there. Put it down a bit if you want to see what's going on. So, in the beginning, you've got that first word. First thing in the Bible.

[6 : 24] There's a beginning. In the beginning, what? Really? Genesis 1, verse 1. In the beginning, an explosion. A big bang. No, no, no.

That's not what the Bible wants to say to us. Genesis 1, verse 1, takes us behind and beyond and above the process of creation.

And said, in the beginning, is a person. A being. God. I've only got three of these to hold up. Do you want to move up? Move up.

We've got in the beginning. Somebody might come and do this one. Yes, Charlotte. You have to leave your colouring. Come and hold this one. Come there.

Come. You can remember this one particularly. Emily's got in the beginning. Do you want to sit on the chair here? In the beginning. What did you say? God.

[7 : 18] In the beginning, God. Yeah, there we go. So hold that. In the beginning, God. Now, in Genesis, chapter 2, we discover he's the Lord God. He's got a personal name. He's involved with people.

And here, simply, God. He's above. He's eternal. He's majestic. There's no arguments here in Genesis 1, at this point, for God's existence.

We're just told he is. He's beyond our imagining. He's outside of. He's before the universe. As the Bible goes on, we're only one, two, three, four words in.

You realise this God who has lived for all eternity. Not lonely. Not by himself, in a sense. In the New Testament, John's Gospel, it starts with words like this.

In the beginning was the Word. Talking about God the Son. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. So first things first of absolutely everything, even before this creation, you and me, nothing.

[8 : 26] A father and a son, unbound by time and space, turned towards each other in loving delight. That's here at the heart of the universe.

Before anything you can see and touch. Next, we're halfway through. Genesis 1, the action. In the beginning, this majestic God acted. He created.

He created. He created. In the Bible, it's only God who creates. Think of an artist.

And their freedom and their power. I create this. So God decides what he'll make with his imagination and his wisdom.

And he does it. He creates it all. And he doesn't make stuff like you and I do. And one of the sad things about having children who are growing up is less than, a little bit less in our house, made than they used to be.

[9 : 34] It may be embarrassing, about ten years ago. But they have constant output every day of stuff that gets created. And I've been looking at this next to my computer for a while.

This little owl. I don't know if you can see here. Let me put it on the screen. Because, oh no. Where's that owl gone? Did I go past him? Oh, he's not in there, the owl, unfortunately.

But this little owl was made by someone in our family. I'm not saying who. And it's made by some squishy clay. So she got some squishy clay and she thought about it.

And she worked, one of the ears has fallen off now, unfortunately. And she worked really hard and she created this beautiful little owl for the creation. What God's talking about here is not quite like that.

Like God didn't borrow some squishy creation material from the craft drawer and fashion something better. Like what he creates is from nothing.

[10:36] Out of nothing. It's all from him. Like you might just be able to think how important this is.

Can you imagine this? Don't imagine it's true. In the beginning there's an eternal God who freely decides to create. Like if that's true, then obviously everything that he makes will have purpose and significance and worth to him.

We're reading really slowly Genesis 1 verse 1. We're almost there. In the beginning God created. He created the heavens and the earth.

Okay, one last bit. You might come sit here and be, not be the heavens here. You're going to have to shoot up a little bit Charlotte. Push up next to Emily. Somebody might go and hold this.

I'm not looking at anyone in particular. Or should I just leave it on the chair? I'm leaving it on the chair. In the beginning God created. He created the heavens and the earth.

[11:38] Now look again. There's no comment straight away on the process of how he did it. But rather what he created. The heavens and the earth deliberately covers everything.

Refers to the whole organised space, time, universe in which we live right now. Covers everything you and I can't see. There are spiritual powers and angels.

There's a throne room of God. Covers everything you and I might be able to see. With a decent telescope. Black holes and galaxies and stars.

And it covers everything you can see with your naked eye. The atmosphere and the earth and forests and lakes and precious metals and mud and leaves and sea creatures and animals and human beings.

This God is the single creator of absolutely everything and everything. That's what Genesis 1 says.

[12:43] He's not the result of our imagination and desire. We are the result of his. Okay, well, do you think you said a lot or a little in Genesis 1 verse 4?

I think you said so much. In the beginning God, Father, Son and Spirit. Uncreated, unbounded, eternal. And God freely, powerfully acts.

This uncreated, created, created all things. There's no proof mentioned here for God up front. No mention of how the universe is fine-tuned or the beauty and regularity of nature.

We could think about those things. He said simply, bold claim to grapple with. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And I want to say, just as we draw from this to a close, this really shapes how we think, doesn't it? It should shape all of our life. It shapes how we think about God. It's not true that all is God around us.

[13:51] You probably can't see this picture, I think. It's not true that God is in everything. The idea that there's a bit of God in you and in me and in the trees and the hills and everything divine.

God and the Lord are all mixed up together. People think that. And so to tap into God, you become warmed of nature and so on. No, no, no. God is outside of his creation.

He, the uncreated one. And everything you see and touch is the work of his hands. Like when you make a bit of a project. That's why, by the way, medium-age children and older children, it is really silly to think that science can rule out God's existence.

Because science, like Bunsen burners and magnifying glasses and stuff, I mean, it's wonderful, but it's just about looking at this world and investigating it and seeing how it works.

Say you've investigated how the solar system works and it's starting to make sense. Does that mean, therefore, there's no God? Of course not.

[15:03] He's outside and beyond our eyes and our theories. And everything you look at and study in science is his work. But you're starting to understand a bit better.

Of course science can't rule out the uncreated, creative world. Okay. Here we are. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Just three things. Here's the first thing. All creation belongs to God. Just as someone in our family's owl belongs to her, so this whole universe belongs to our God, our creator.

The Bible starts this out. Psalm 24, verse 1. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all who live on it. It's all his.

The Lord's. Belongs to him. As do all who live in it. So you and me and every person in Cambridge right now, whether we say we believe in him or not, we are his personal possession.

[16:17] We belong to him. Why? Because he founded creation on the seas and established it on the rivers. He made us. He has ownership rights over us.

We should look around and see our world like that. When I was at school a long time ago, we always used to have little pencil tins like this. And you'd write inside with a little sticker, this belongs to Chris Lowe.

Hands off, it's mine. It belongs to me. And if you like, written into us as creatures, written through us, written through all creation, this belongs to the Lord.

Like today, some people might say that's not very good, and maybe we'd rather have no God. In which case, it's my body and my cash and my time. And I'll do what I want with my life and end it where I want.

But you can imagine, if there's no God, there's no maker, then you and I are just accidents. We're advanced, random animals.

[17:20] It would be worth so little. But instead, being his creature and owned by him is good. To the child or the adult who says, I'm dirt, I'm nothing, I'm worthless.

No, you're not. You're his. You belong to him. You're his possession. All creation belonging to him will affect how we see others, how we see his world.

The beggar is his. The unborn baby belongs to him. The earth's resources are his. We are not our own. We belong to our maker. His to direct.

Do you believe that? Second thing, because of a creator's thought, we can have purpose and hope. Woody Allen, no God, no magic, just a cold, hard bath, what you see with your eyes. Our lives mean nothing in this cruel and hostile universe. I'm desperate to believe that.

[18:20] When very hard things happen in your life and make you want to cry out. Amongst us at St. John's at the start of September, all sorts of challenges and struggles going on.

In a chance universe with no designer, there is no purpose to what you go through. There's little hope of things ever getting better. There is no one who is really able to help.

You've got to suck it up and get on with things or curl up and die. But Genesis 1 verse 1 says life's not like that. Our good eternal God plans and creates and we belong to him.

And the rest of the Bible and Genesis will say this powerful creator we can know as our master and our covenant God and our friend. And that will make all the difference in the world to us.

Later in the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah faces desperate times. Things are so hard for him. And he knows that there is more than cold, hard facts of what you see with your eyes.

[19:23] And so instead of falling down in despair, he falls on his knees. And he opens his lips and speaks to his maker and friend.

Our Lord God, it is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and your outstretched armrest. Nothing is too hard for you. And he prays. And the one who made him hears him and hears him and hears him.

And he will do for us today. All creation belongs to God. We can have a purpose and hope. And very finally, our God is worthy of worship.

Isn't he? That reading from Revelation chapter 4 is a vision of the throne room of heaven. And of all creation gathering around God.

And they say, you are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power. For you created all things and by your will they have created and have their being.

[20:27] You're the creator. You've done. Everything we see around here comes from you. You are good and majestic and honourable. And we belong to you.

And so they fall down and worship you. Because he is worthy of our worship. And as they sing in heaven, so it should be for us today.

Genesis 1, verse 1. I'm so looking forward to these next few months. This is so important. This is it. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Thank you.