

The Creator Creates Creation

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[0 : 0 0] It's wonderful. And we, as a church family, we've decided to look together at the first 11 chapters of Genesis this fall. The children are doing that in Sunday school.

The Tuesday night central focus group and a number of small groups are going to be doing it before Christmas. And we need to start at the very beginning. It's a very good place to start.

Thank you very much. And the 9 o'clock congregation didn't get that reference. Which is verses 1 and 2, as David Ellis brilliantly said, page 1, chapter 1, 1, 1, everything, if you wanted to open your Bible and have a look at it.

But there's a problem, isn't there? As soon as we open the Bible at page 1, there are two problems, actually. One is with the preacher. Because it is impossible for any preacher to come close to catching the simple power and dignity and beauty of Genesis chapter 1.

Do you know in the Hebrew, the first line has seven words in it and the second line has 14 words of it and there is this beauty, there are these silences and there is a kind of a rhythm and there are musical and numerical and spiritual echoes that are really impossible for the preacher to grasp.

[1 : 2 0] And therefore we need to pray, I think, that at the end of sermons and gatherings and studies, that God himself will have done a work in our hearts and we'll know that if we come to worship him more fully through understanding this.

And the second problem is not on my side of the equation, it's on your side of the equation.

Because when we come to the book of Genesis, we come with all our questions, don't we? Now how is this relevant?

How does it fit with my understanding of science and paleontology? And how is this going to make me a nicer person? And the problem is that when we come to Genesis particularly, God comes to us with his questions and all of a sudden our questions become less important.

Because God's questions go underneath our questions. Who are you? Or in chapter 3, what have you done? Where do you come from?

Why are you here? Why are you anxious? And this section of the Bible, perhaps unlike any other section, goes deep under our lives into the foundations of our lives.

[2 : 3 0] We all have foundations. The decisions that we make and the priorities, the choices that you and I are making in the fall term are based on the foundations and they're invisible to all sorts of people around us.

And some of those foundations are from God and are eternal and fantastic and some of them, like wooden foundations of a house, frankly, are rotten and false. And as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, you can build a very impressive edifice on top of foundations, but you can be building on sand and in the long run it'll be swept away.

And what my prayer is, what God will do for us, with us, in us, during these studies in Genesis, is He will go into the foundations of our lives, strengthening those that are right, but exposing what is false and what is rotten and removing them and replacing them.

And I think that can be a very difficult exercise. It's particularly difficult because those of us who think we don't need to have our foundations exposed are those who most need to have our foundations exposed.

And so we need to pray that that will happen as well. Let me read to you the first two verses. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

[3 : 5 4] The earth was without form and void. Darkness was upon the face of the deep. The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. Couldn't get bigger than that, could you?

The Creator created creation in one massive act and then in two weeks' time when we pick up from verse 3, we move into the six days of creation which are not so much six creative events as they

are God taking this without form and void and filling it and moving it from chaos to order. And as we approach this first chapter in the Bible, I really want us to hold two things in mind. The first is the artistry. There's nothing like Genesis 1 in any other literature.

There is this restrained power. It's quite remarkable, really. There are these patterns lying underneath the surface. It's not quite poetry. It's not quite prose.

It's not quite song. It goes behind history. It's like the book of Revelation. It's unlike anything else that addresses our imagination. It is not, strictly speaking, poetry.

[5 : 06] But there is a rhythm to it. And there are these silences which make us ask all sorts of questions. And do you know the chapter circles around a series of numbers, three and seven and ten.

You know, seven days. Seven times God said that it was good. Ten times God said. Ten times according to their own kind.

Three times He gives blessing. The last time, three times. Ten times. But here's a problem. I think we've got to be careful not to be dazzled by the artistry and forget the point.

So keep the artistry in mind. But the second thing to keep in mind as we approach this chapter is Jesus. Because Jesus has a very definite view of Genesis. Do you remember after He rose from the dead, Jesus gathered His disciples together and He said that all the Old Testament and He makes reference to the law of Moses bears witness to Him.

In other words, in Jesus' view, Genesis chapter 1 is specifically God the Father speaking about Him. That's more than saying that Jesus is the heart of the Bible or that He fulfills what's going on in Genesis 1.

[6 : 28] But it means this. As we approach this word with all its brilliance and beauty, we need to pray for the kind of humility that will not only see the wonder of what God is doing, but we will come to love and see the person of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. I have three points this morning. The first is long, the second is short, and the third is very short.

The first point is only God creates. In the beginning, God created everything.

Everything that exists was made by God. Sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, ocean, trees, insects, it's all made by God.

So next time you go, you drive up the sea to sky to Whistler Mountain, know that God made Whistler Mountain.

[7 : 31] Touch the mountain. God made it. Next time, at the end of summer, as the sun is going down, have you ever noticed how the Arbutus trees glow as though they've got this gold inside them?

God made them. As we walk out the door this morning, there's a maple that's starting to turn just to the left of the door. Know that God made that. And when you look at a tree and you see the beauty of the world, we need to give thanks to God.

Because this word, create, is only ever used of God. Only God creates out of nothing who brings into being that which is not.

And that means that every issue that keeps you awake at night and every issue that wakes you up in the middle of the night has to be secondary to this great big issue. It is He that has made us, not we ourselves.

We belong to Him. We belonged to Him at the beginning. We belong to Him at the end. He is the Alpha and the Omega and that is the only basis for knowing who we are or why we're here and where we're going.

[8 : 38] Yesterday, Dr. Walkie gave a great illustration. He said, if you rip out the creation narrative from the Bible, life is like being thrown onto a stage and you don't know who wrote the play and you don't know the story arc, you don't know where the story began, you don't have lines, you don't know where it's going and so basically all you do is whatever first comes into your mind.

You jump up and down or fall on the floor screaming like some of the plays I've seen in the last year but basically you're lost on stage. But to say that God effortlessly creates this universe is a deeply subversive truth.

I want you to see this. To say that only God creates. It doesn't just mean we can't begin to understand ourselves without it nor does it mean that the only true basis for social well-being is God.

If I can show you this, if you keep your finger in Genesis 1 and turn to the last book of the Bible to Revelation 4 verse 11 where we are wonderfully allowed to listen to the chorus in heaven these familiar words in Revelation 4 11 they sing worthy art thou our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power why?

for thou didst create all things and by thy will they existed and were created.

[10:14] You see what's going on? That song that's going on in heaven draws a line through reality and on one side of the line it puts God who is the creator and on the other side of the line it puts everything else in the created category.

and everything on this side owes its existence to God who is on that side but that's not all everything created owes him worship as well and for any creature on this side to worship another creature on this side and not to worship God is not just foolishness and idolatry but it's blasphemy. It's a very subversive truth you see. It means the world that you and I live in it has no pivot in itself. There is no ultimate meaning in this world separated from God.

This week Vancouver welcomed the Dalai Lama who is opening the Dalai Lama Centre. He came with his message of inner peace and calmness. Do you know Friday night we had a gathering of about 80 people here in the church for a concert?

Friday night we had a gathering over in North Vancouver for a number of congregations thousands of young people flocked to hear the Dalai in downtown Vancouver. I've never met him I understand he's a very nice person nothing against him personally but I think one of the reasons for his popularity is not just that he has stood up against a repressive regime but because he teaches that all the answers to life are on this side of the line they're in us they're in this world and that the meaning of life has nothing to do with God being our creator and worshipping and bowing before him his solution to the big issues like how to save our planet nothing to do with giving glory to God but they have to do with human bonding and peaceful conversation I think that's very attractive during the holidays I read a magazine called New Renaissance it's a wonderful critique of western individualism and materialism the philosophy it's pushing is called neo-humanism quote neo-humanism opens us to our full humanity beyond race religion nation or any other self-imposed limitation being fully human is finding our own divinity and spirituality in ourselves the wonderful mix of pseudoscience and what's left over of the human potential movement

[12:57] I quote again the DNA double helix is a symbol of the unity of life that there is indeed a script and so a meaning of life and the way we find that meaning is by evolving spiritually now I'm guessing not many of us here are tempted by neo-humanism but I'd be shocked if a large group of your friends and family are not strongly influenced by it and even closet neo-humanists and the first verse of the Bible says in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth only God creates that's the first point the second is in verse 2 and it is the presence of the Spirit of God the earth was without form and it was empty and darkness was on the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters here is the presence of God before he speaks in verse 3 moving over creation he's not part of creation he's not in creation physically in creation or physically in heaven he is moving over eternally present drawing near and here's the assurance that what is going to happen next and what is going to happen for all eternity with creation is the purpose and plan of God the presence of the Spirit hovering over creation is a demonstration that creation itself is an act of great kindness and grace from God and that God doesn't just throw off the world and kind of go back to his eternal Godness but God somehow binds himself to this creation in a way that the Bible later talks about as covenant and fills this creation with meaning this material world with meaning so that our lives and this world become the place in which we may have friendship with God and live in relation with him and I think this is deeply subversive in its own way you see there are basically two kinds of religion in the world the pagan religions many of them saw all the real action and meaning out there in the realm of the gods this natural world this material world it's not all that important

Hinduism calls this world Maya illusion the ancient Greeks say our physical bodies are a prison for our souls other religions see this world as the place of real action and meaning and the gods are a pale and trivial reflection of ourselves secret to life the meaning of life is to be found in this material world not in the realm of the gods now I think there is a Christianized form of this duality in the way many Christians respond to the whole scientific enterprise and I want to take my courage in my hand and wade in here today and let Steve James clean the mess up next week if I possibly can how do we how do Christians respond to the fossils and paleontology and microbiology and the

human genome sequencing on the one hand many Christians see science as a threat to God and a threat to their faith and what they do is they insist on a literalistic interpretation of Genesis chapter 1 text isn't poetic it isn't symbolic and they see the vast majority of their friends as having sold out bowing to the sacred cow of science and science with its atheistic philosophy must be resisted at the other extreme there are many

Christians who desperately want to harmonise the Bible with scientific discovery they're convinced of the evidence that's widely accepted in the scientific community and they insist that we have to read Genesis 1 in a way that harmonises with modern discoveries and they see those who don't read the Bible this way as having a faith which is compartmentalised and even dishonest and what we have to do is to bring the Bible into every area of study the first represents a desire to honour the word of God and not to bow to any external authority the second represents a desire to honour all truth as God's truth and not to bury our heads in the sand and I just I want you to see that verse 2 cuts right across both views both views I think represent a temptation to dishonour the text the first wants to impose a literalism on the text that is not there the second wants to and this is probably a greater temptation wants to impose an anachronism on the text that's not there trying to read the text through our lenses from today and you see the presence of the Holy Spirit cuts across both those interpretations do you know in the New Testament we are told that Jesus upholds this universe by the word of his power in other words if Jesus did not consciously hold us in existence right now we would cease to exist there's not a molecule or an atom or an electron or a quark or an anti-quark the last three of which I've learned a lot about during this summer none of those move without Jesus

Christ's explicit will and the God of the Bible is present in the creation he is not a God of the gaps and he is involved in every detail in every circumstance of our lives so when a hair falls from our head it is both a perfectly natural thing and God does it when a sparrow falls it is a perfectly natural thing and God does it he controls it all the reason that there is order in creation is not so that we will discover it all and speak the language of God it's so that we will worship him God is present by his spirit and the third and final point is this only God begins and I want to teach you some Hebrew Bereshith Barah Elohim which is in the beginning created

God Bereshith Barah and the words echo each other in the beginning God created and the idea is that only true beginnings come from God any beginning that will be life giving or spirit filled can come from God alone that is why King David deeply aware of his own sexual deviancy deeply aware of his own duplicity and murder praise to God create there's that word create in me a clean heart oh God because a clean heart and a new heart new can only be begun by God himself you know when we come to the last chapter of the Bible the Apostle John says I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first earth had passed away and the one who sits upon the throne says behold I am making all things new

[20 : 54] I am the Alpha and the Omega and between that instant when God created the heavens and the earth and the day when he will bring a new heavens and a new earth the Apostle Paul tells us that if anyone is in Christ Jesus they are a new creation the old has passed away behold the new has come because Jesus Christ is the one through whom and for whom all things were made and when we come to him in simple faith he comes to us and he remakes us and he recreates us and he makes us part of the new creation it's a wonderful place for us to start this term I don't know what God has for you in the next four months for some of us there will be tremendous challenges for others tremendous opportunities but I do know this that if

God is the creator and if the spirit is with us then he is able to do far more than we can ask or think and I think every congregation every Christian congregation faces its own challenges and I think in our own unique challenges one of the strong temptations for us is to become too cautious too careful to be afraid to risk in faith as though God is not the creator and the spirit is not present I want to urge us all to pray this way this is time for us to move forward in ministry to take risks that bear witness to the fact that Jesus Christ has brought the new creation these next months they're a gift from God the creator and we need to live each day as though that is true I think we need to take courage from these profoundly subversive truths and act on them and pray them so that they become part of the deep foundation of our lives and we don't limit what God is going to do to our boundaries but we pray and do what is truly new saying with the apostle Paul to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever

amen amen to our who