

# The Week at a Glance

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[ 0 : 01 ] You'll find it helpful if you open your Bible to Genesis chapter 1. Very easy to find, first page, Genesis chapter 1. We're going back to this passage.

I'm grateful to Steve James for speaking to us last week. As we go back to Genesis 1, we go back to the passage which gives us every important issue in our life and every major question in our lives.

Ends up coming back to this chapter. Much more interested in the big questions of who and why than how, which is why you won't find dinosaurs or Australopithecus in chapter 1.

We're going to get that out of the way when we start. I think as we began to see two weeks ago, this is the most remarkably subversive chapter. It goes underneath every philosophy and every world view.

It goes deeply into the foundations of our lives and forces us to ask the question, who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here?

[ 1 : 12 ] And you're aware, I'm sure, that if you read this chapter a couple of times, I do hope that's your pattern on Sundays. Whatever's preached on, you take it home and check the preacher is right and read it and find out for yourselves.

But there are a number of patterns of seven. Seven times five, the times that God is referred to. Seven times three, the times that heaven is referred to and the times that earth is referred to. Seven words in the first sentence, 14 words in the second sentence and then when you get to day seven, there are three sentences with seven words each. And as I said last time, we need to beware lest the artistry blind us to the simple truth that God is the star, God is the soloist. He is the subject of almost every verb and certainly every sentence. And the whole creation narrative is structured around these seven days which show us the supremely magisterial, effortless power of God.

And each day is structured in the same way. There's an announcement. We hear, and God said. And then we hear a report of what he said, let there be. And then it was so.

[ 2 : 27 ] And then God names the thing that he has just made. God called the darkness night, etc. And then God steps back and he takes pleasure in what he's made.

He says, it was good. And then we read, there was evening and morning on the first day, the second day, etc. Now, there are lots of lovely details in this chapter, but there's one main point. And I can't resist giving you some of the details. And I'm aware that if I say that right early in the sermon, that you'll switch off until I come back to the one main point.

But that's a danger I'm going to have to take. I want to give you four details before we come to the one main point. Is that alright? They're like practice swings. And then we're going to hit the ball for those of you who are golfers.

Here are the four things. The first is, very obviously, God creates everything by his word. Look down at 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.

[ 3 : 37 ] And it was so. God called the dry land earth. The waters were gathered together. He called seas. God saw that it was good. And God said, let the earth, etc.

You see, God does not use any tool. He does not take his hand and make it. He doesn't create a great big cosmic shovel and make it. He speaks and it happens.

And that means, you see, that the great connection between God and his world is through his word. One of the reasons why we, as we meet together week by week, at the centre of what we do is we read and we pray through and we study God's word, comes from this creation narrative because the connection between God and his world is through his word.

That is why God's people are people of the ear and not the eye. God is present with us through his word and not through images.

That's the first point he creates by his word. Secondly, God says that the world is good. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but every time God makes something in this passage, he steps back and evaluates his creation.

[ 4 : 55 ] And when he says it's good, it doesn't mean it's morally upright. It means beautiful. And that tells us an enormous amount about God.

It tells us that God delights in delight, that he loves what is beautiful and that everything that is made is not corrupt or is not illusion or is not somehow frustrating, but it exactly satisfies what he wants and fulfills his desire.

God is a God who enjoys what he has made. Isn't that wonderful? Thirdly, creation is shaped by a week. I don't need to remind you that Christians differ on how we should understand these seven days in creation.

Some believe they are a literal seven days, 24-hour periods. Others believe that they are seven long, million-year geological periods of time.

And as I've been reading on this, there are at least six major views in between those two views. The lovely thing is that most of the commentators I've read in the last couple of weeks who hold different views do so with humility and goodwill to those who disagree with them.

[ 6 : 11 ] That is that there are intelligent and articulate and well-read Christians who believe that the Word of God is infallible and who recognise that we can disagree on this without losing love.

Let me give you what I think. There's only one person who came up and disagreed with me after the first service. My own view is that the six days cannot be solar, literal days.

The simple reason for that is the sun was not created until the fourth day. And thank you. That's a very simple point. And that when we come to day seven, it's just sinking in.

As you come to day seven, there's no evening and morning on day seven. That means we're still in day seven, you see. On the other hand, I also do not think that we can tie the six days to any shifting scientific paradigm.

I just don't think it's honest to try and harmonise Genesis 1 with evolution. The trees are made before marine organisms. The birds are made before insects.

[ 7 : 26 ] And here's a very obvious thing. The sun is created on day four, after the earth, after vegetation and after trees. So, I just don't think you can coerce Genesis 1 into either a seven-day literal view or in a harmony with evolution.

And the reason I think that is because to do so misses the point of Genesis 1. The interest is not in a mathematical chronology, but it's to reveal God's plan of how everything relates to Him and of move us towards the seventh day, to the Sabbath, which I want to deal with in two weeks' time, the Sabbath and rest and work.

What's happening here is much deeper, wider and bigger than a geometric chronology. God uses the structure of a week to order time and space in human life for this reason, to bring us into the joy of the blessing of the seventh day.

And now there is a fourth detail and it's here I think I'm going to lose people. I've told this story before. In my younger days when I was in Australia, I once preached a sermon on a passage I didn't understand, which has never stopped me before or since.

That's not quite true. But I still don't understand that passage. And I got to about two-thirds of the way through the sermon and I looked up at the faces of the congregation and everyone had that sort of look, you know, what are you talking about?

[ 8 : 57 ] So, I stopped and I said, is this making sense to anyone? And they all went, no. So, I put my notes aside and I just spoke from the heart of what I thought the passage was and I said, is that any better?

And they said, no. So, I said, let's pray and we blessed each other and went home. Now, this fourth detail is very important but I'm aware we might lose some people.

So, if you see someone beside you going to sleep, just nudge them gently. The fourth point is this, that the seven days are not flat, consecutive seven days.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. There are two triplets and day one, two, three perfectly match day four, five, six. One, two, three goes from the heavens through the waters to the earth and four, five, six, from the heavens through the waters to the earth.

In day one and four, there's one creative act. In day two and five, there's one act with two aspects. In day three and day six, there are two creative acts.

[10:13] And here is the remarkable thing. Days one to three, what God is doing is forming the world and then in days four to six, he is filling it, forming and filling.

Look back to chapter one, verse two. Do you remember in verse two, it began, the earth was, here are the two words, without form and void, formless and empty.

And what happens in the first three days is God gives form and structure and boundaries to the world. He creates limitations and he makes the world habitable and then in days four to six, he blesses and fills and gives life and peoples.

Listen to this. Days one to three are about boundaries and days four to six are about blessing and here is the one point, Genesis, this chapter one, that in this creation that God has created, boundaries and blessing go together.

You cannot have blessing outside of God's boundaries. So, let's have a look quickly at the two main ideas, this boundaries and blessing. Days one to three, look at day one, verse three.

[11:31] God said, let there be light and there was light and God saw that the light was good and God separated the light from the darkness, called the light day, the darkness he called night and there was evening and morning one day.

The Bible begins with light, no sun. It ends with light and no sun and here is the key, he separates light from darkness. You know light and darkness don't naturally separate?

God does that. He sets boundaries on light and dark. And when we come to day four and the sun and the moon and the stars, it's very interesting that they are not gods and they don't control our destiny.

Astrology is a, no, it's just false basically. Let's look at day two. God said, verse six, let there be an expanse.

Firmament, not a helpful translation, expanse in the midst of the waters. Let it separate. There's the word again, verse seven. God made the expanse and separated the waters.

[12:34] And on day three, what God does is to gather the waters to make dry land and places trees and vegetation to bear fruit. Here is the point. The separations serve God's order.

They create distinctions, they create places, inside and outside, differences, so there's no confusion. That's why every time God makes something, it happens each according to its own kind. And that is why God names things that he creates. He names the light day and he names the darkness night to show that both darkness as well as light are under his sovereign rule and control. They're both his. He has separated them. This is so important. There are so many implications to this. I wish we could spend a bit of time on it. We can't. Let me point to, all science is a product of Genesis chapter 1.

Because you see God has separated things, this world is not irrational or random. It's regular and predictable because of the boundaries the Creator has made. Well, let me make the second application.

[13:37] This is a very important truth to every one of us who are suffering. It may be some external circumstance. It may be something within your heart. It may be something in your body.

You may have lost someone. This is very, very important. And I want to show you this by, if you keep your finger in Genesis and turn over to Job chapter 38 on page 468 for just a moment.

Remember the extraordinary suffering of Job. Physical, mental, from his family, emotional. And for 35 chapters, Job's friends have been sending him Hallmark cards and Job wants to die.

And before chapter 38, he yells out at God, what use is it to believe in you when you can't protect me from this agonising suffering? I am in physical excruciating pain.

My body is deformed. I've lost my children. They have died. I have no future. I've kept myself from sin and what has it got me? What use is faith in you?

[14:58] And in chapter 38, God wonderfully and gently and graciously answers Job. And the essence of God's answers to Job are this, I have set boundaries in place.

Look at 38 verse 4. This is an important question. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Verse 8.

Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst forth from the womb? When I made clouds in its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band and prescribed bounds for it, set the bars and doors, said, Thus far you shall come and no farther and here shall your proud ways be stayed and

on and on through the chapter.

Very important to anyone who is suffering, you see. The thing about suffering is it makes you feel alone and fearful that there are no boundaries to it and God says, The darkness I have put boundaries to as well as the light.

There is nothing beyond my control. The flood may come, the fire may come, but God is the one who says, This far and no further. It may even take our life but we are still in God's control.

[16:17] He is there in the darkness naming, ruling, bounding. There is no place we can go. There is nothing that can happen that takes us beyond God's sovereign word of grace.

So, days 1 to 3, let's go back to Genesis, are about setting boundaries. And the last, very quickly, the last days are about God setting blessing.

The reason for the order and boundary is that God wants to place into those boundaries his blessing. At the heart of verse 28, let me just point this out to you.

In verse 28, And God blessed them, this is the man and the woman he's created. God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the air and over the birds of the air.

Sorry, the fish of the sea. The fish aren't in the air. Well, not at this stage. The fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the ground. This word blessing is a word that Christians, we Christians use this for some vague thing that's nice and has to do with God.

[17:27] I have discovered in the southern states of the US it's a kind of an insult. When someone is doing something or thinking something that's wrong, in the south they say, Bless your heart, which is a way of saying, you're an idiot, really.

It happened to me for a long time until I woke up to it. What blessing means is it means to fill with the potential for life.

So, God takes the creatures that he's made that are already good and he places them in the boundaries that he's created that are good and then he blesses them with this potential of life-giving and blessing.

Part of the blessing for us as humans is to be made in the image of God and have dominion over his world and that's what we're going to look at next week. You see, here the blessing of God is given to us right into what we would call a natural physical process.

See, this physical world is the vehicle and place of God's blessing. God's blessing isn't way up there, out there, beyond planet Zuno.

[18:48] It is in this life and life itself, you see, is a gift from God and life is never neutral which has all sorts of medical implications, doesn't it? But here is the simplest point, here is the one point of the passage, that the blessing that God has given, he has given within his boundaries.

Henri Blocher is a French commentator. He wonderfully points out that the basic impulse of pagan religion is to do exactly the opposite.

It comes from a longing to dissolve all difference and to mix everything up together. So, the way pagan religion works is you take the categories of creation and you break them open and cross them so that you can release spiritual energy.

So, the sexual orgy in pagan religion was a way to rejuvenate the world by plunging it back into the creative chaos. And I think the culture that you and I live in is allergic to the idea of limitations and boundaries.

They say life and blessing cannot be inside the boundaries that God sets. Life and blessing is breaking the boundaries. Last year, Bron and I visited the great city of Toffino and we were strolling along the harbour front one night and there was a storefront offering something, I think it was called Extreme Adventures and Brahman was attracted to it, I wasn't myself.

[20:22] Things like open sea kayaking and spelunking and caving and wave riding and there was one poster advertising the firm in the window and it had the most amazing photographs of people doing the most amazing things and underneath was one sentence, one motto and it said this, Note to self, go way outside your boundaries and Brahman signed up.

She didn't. Now, you see, it's one thing to test ourselves physically and that's a good thing but I think this has become the catch cry and the life motto of our culture in just about any area.

Medicine, fulfilling your dreams, sexuality, church life, you name it. We want to rise above those old distinctions of good and evil.

We want to reject any kind of separation which stops me from doing what I want. I want to be free from what God says, the limiting and confining and restricting boundaries of God's word and I resent anyone who tells me that my dream or this life or this world has some form of God-shaped boundary to it and it's tragic and it's self-defeating.

It is a profound dissatisfaction with being created by night. It is a desperate desire not to be myself. [ 21 : 52 ] It is a revolt against God which comes from my need of God and I think, brothers and sisters, we are deeply infected with the spirit of our age.

We are embarrassed with the very things that God has given us which shape our lives into blessing. One last cross-reference. Let's turn to Isaiah 45.

I want to show you this. Page 641. Very interesting to me that most of the times that the rest of the Bible meditates on creation, it meditates on this whole idea of boundaries and blessing, belonging together.

Let's have a look at Isaiah 45, verse 18 and 19. For thus says the Lord who created the heavens, he is God, who formed the earth and made it, he established it, he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited, I am the Lord and there is no other, I did not speak in secret in a land of darkness, I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, seek me in chaos, I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right.

You see, life and limits belong together. God does not say, seek me in chaos. And when I'm speaking about boundaries, I'm not speaking about the arbitrary human boundaries that are created.

[ 23 : 35 ] Because most of the arbitrary human boundaries that we have created ought to be jumped across. but I'm talking about the boundaries that God has revealed. Now, this is where the idea of holiness comes from.

Remember in the second reading that Fiona read, God says, be holy as I am holy. And the word holy simply means to be separate, to be different. And that is why God blesses for seventh day and calls it holy.

It's a different day and we are to be different. And at the end of Shabbat, the end of the Sabbath in the synagogue, they pray the prayer called Abdallah. This is the prayer for the end of the day. Praise be to thee, O Lord our God, King of the world, who dost distinguish the sacred from the profane, the light from the darkness, Israel from other nations, the seventh day from the days of work.

Praise be to thee, O Lord, who dost distinguish the sacred from the profane. I finish with this. When we open the New Testament, we read these words.

[ 24 : 42 ] In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him. Without Him was not anything made that was made.

In Him was life. And that life was the light of men. In Genesis 1, God sets the boundaries by His Word. He sets the blessing by His Word.

And now we find in Jesus Christ that the Lord of the Sabbath has come, the one in whom and through whom all things were made. Which means that we cannot understand creation apart from Him and we cannot understand Him apart from creation.

And He comes bringing the blessing of God, which we lost. and that eternal blessing is found within the boundaries of Jesus Christ.

He has spoken blessing to us. He has given blessing to us. Jesus Christ. And we ought to do the same for one another and we ought to do the same for Him.

[ 25 : 48 ] Because the mountains and the hills skip and clap and so should we. And we'll think about this a little more next week. Let's kneel the prayer.