

Paradise Created

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[0 : 00] Genesis, which is a Greek word translated from the Hebrew, the original Hebrew, which means in the beginning. And so what Genesis does for us, it gives us the beginning of the doctrine of God is what the beginning is. It's the beginning of the doctrine of God, of who God is, but also of his creation. That is what we know about God, what we know about creation, about ourselves and about salvation, it all begins right here in Genesis. What I'm saying is that if you read the Bible correctly, it is not fundamentally about us. It's about God. And it's about who he is and what he has done and continues to do. It's no accident that God is the very first sentence of the Bible.

And the name of God is referred to 35 times and dominates the first chapter. God is the subject of the first chapter of the Bible. That's not often how we read it. The storyline of the Bible, which is a single storyline, is a storyline that moves from creation to the fall, what God has done to rescue it and renew his creation through grace, which takes us eventually to the end where he will renew all things. It's a single storyline of the whole Bible. It's a storyline that has its foundation in Genesis 1-11. And it's our focus, as Jess has said, in the lead up to Christmas.

Genesis 1-11 gives us the earliest of history of the world. It gives us this early history by relating to us five stories. In Genesis 1-11, consists of five stories that all have the same structure.

The five stories are the fall into sin, the story of Cain, the sons of God marrying the daughters of men, the flood and the tower of Babel. And the five stories have a fourfold pattern to them that's repeated.

Sin is described. God speaks, announcing the penalty for the sin. God then brings grace to the solution to ease the misery that sin has caused. And then God punishes the sin. And the amazing thing, as you see in the first 11 chapters, is that as sin increases, so grace increases more and more.

[2 : 58] And so therefore, Romans 5 comes to fruition in its very first chapters of the Bible. It's a foundation, if you like, the pillars of the rest of the Bible, the message of the rest of the Bible.

And so today we're starting in the beginning of creation. And as we have just declared in the Apostles' Creed, we believe in God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth. So three things. If you've got the St. Paul's outline there on the app, you'll see I've got three things there.

Understanding creation, practicing creation, and lastly, experiencing creation, or I've sort of thought this morning, might even call that enjoying creation. But we'll get there. Okay. Understanding creation. Now, us modern people, especially those of us with a Western heritage, when we read Genesis 1, we immediately think of the question, how?

How? That's the immediate thing. That's the very first question we impose upon this text. How? And Darwin's theory of evolution springs to mind. We have questions about dinosaurs and the age of the planet and all that sort of stuff. One of the crucial issues when we read the Bible, in fact, when we read any text, is to ask the question, what is the author's intention in writing this?

And the key is to understand his intention in order to understand the meaning. And so as we open Genesis, there is one thing we can be absolutely certain of. When Genesis was written, the author wasn't thinking about Darwin's theory of evolution. At all. Not even remotely.

They weren't thinking about the cultural wars of the West. At all. But since it's often on our minds, as Westerners, and particularly, and we want to impose something on the text, I want to say something very briefly about it, and then I'm going to park it. I'm not going to mention it again.

[5 : 15] Historically, there are at least six different views on what is meant by the six days of creation in Genesis 1. Through the centuries, there have been Christians who have had a very high view of the Bible, who have considered the reference to days in Genesis 1 as literally 24-hour periods as we know them today.

And there have been plenty of Christians also with an extremely high view of the Bible, who have not seen it that way at all. And to this day, friends on both sides still exist as friends.

The people who have not seen it that way have a variety of different... They see the Bible as a variety of different types of texts.

They see that there's historical narrative, there's prophecies, there's poetry, there's songs.

Historical narrative makes itself clear with references to things like world events, people, times, eyewitness testimony.

Poetry, on the other hand, makes itself clear by things like repetitiveness and parallelism. There are a few places, in fact, in the Bible where it's not entirely clear what it is that we're dealing with when we read the text.

[6 : 40] Genesis chapter 1 is one of those places. Genesis chapter 2 is not one of those places.

Genesis 2 is historical narrative. It reads like an account of what... exactly what happened. But Genesis 1 has quite a repetitive pattern.

Over and over again we read, He said, He said, and it was. He saw, and it was good. It was evening, and then it was morning. Over and over again. It has a repetitive pattern that is not the way that historic narrative is written.

I think Genesis 2 is a history of what God did, but Genesis 1 is a song about God and what God has done.

Another example of... is in Exodus 14 and 15. Exodus 14 is a historical narrative about the crossing of the Red Sea, and it's put alongside Miriam's song about the same event in Exodus 15, which is clearly a song.

[7 : 53] It is clearly poetry looking on the event of Exodus 14. The key thing, though, is that wherever you land with this, it's important to remember one key thing.

It is established fact that godly, Bible-loving people who have given their lives to God's Word have differed over the opening chapter of the Bible.

Faithful Bible scholars have landed differently on this issue, and they got on.

It would seem over the last 20 years or so, there's been much more of a war over these issues.

There are people who disdain those who hold to the literal reading of Genesis 1 as being primitive fundamentalists.

Likewise, there are those who regard as enemies of truth, those who don't think these are literal 24-hour days, as if Genesis 1 is the test for orthodoxy.

[9 : 08] There is a harshness to the debate that doesn't present gospel humility, and it's not the kind of church that I want us to be at St. Paul's as we discuss these matters amongst ourselves.

We have a great deal of humility towards one another. If you want to know where I stand on the issue, then I'm with the people who interpret Genesis 1 as a song. Now, that does not mean that I give in to the theory of evolution, because I don't.

It's a theory that has dominated the sciences for just a little over 100 years. That's all. And it's a theory that is currently, to our day, amongst physicists and philosophers, as increasingly discredited and losing its prominence due to flimsy evidence and dubious hypothesis.

While Genesis 1 is poetry, I'm certain that Genesis 2 and onwards is history. But wherever you stand with this, our goal should be to read this text and notice what God is saying.

And what we know is that when God speaks, the chaos becomes cosmos. To come under God's word is to move from disorder to order.

[10 : 40] And our key job is to do the hard work of coming under what the Bible actually says. And that's it. I'm not going to talk about evolution there again.

Going to move on, because I don't think it's the issue of Genesis 1. So let's move on to my second point, how it is that we practice the doctrine of creation.

And there are at least four things about this that I think have very practical outcomes for us as we look at the doctrine of creation. First of all, we see the goodness of creation.

Notice the repetition of God and he saw and it was good. God made it, he said it, came into existence and it was good.

Eastern religions say that the physical world is an illusion and at one day it's all going to fade away.

Western religions, coming off the back of the Greeks and the Romans, say that fundamentally the world is bad.

[11 : 44] The body and material world are bad, but the spirit is good. And only biblical, only Christian faith, Christian faith of the Bible, has a high view.

In fact, the highest view of the physical creation. The storyline of the Bible, the plan of God revealed in time and space, is a movement entirely from creation to new creation.

It begins with, the Bible begins with creation and it ends with a new creation. The plan of God is to resurrect bodies into a new heaven and a new earth, a new perfect physical reality.

Only the Christian faith speaks of that kind of reality. Only the Bible has a vision of spirit and matter existing in integrity forever.

And that has many practical implications for the Christian. The Bible is filled with prophecy that say the natural world that we live in is but a shadow of what it is going to be like when the Lord comes back.

[12 : 58] That is great news. We're not going to be going to clouds and floating around as spirits. We will be as alive, in fact, even more alive than what we are today.

Isaiah refers to the coming of the Lord of all creation as a great party. Jesus reveals that he is, in fact, the Lord of creation and enjoys a party at his very first miracle.

where he turns the water into wine. He's there at a wedding celebration. The wine's drying up. It's about to dip. Everything's about to go bad for the wedding.

Jesus comes along and kicks it up a notch. He's the Lord of creation. He's the Lord of the party.

Jesus produces so much wine it would have been impossible for them to consume it all.

Such is his abundance. Jesus is not who religion has made him out to be.

[14 : 05] God's work in Jesus to recreate his broken world is centered on joy, celebration, and festivities. The goodness of creation is a profound Christian motive for playfulness.

Profound Christian motive for playfulness. A great kiss. A fantastic sunset. A satisfying meal is but a dim picture of what we're going to eternally have in the new heavens and the new earth.

And we have a fantastic foretaste of it now. We can receive life gladly and cherish it now. The second thing we learn quite practical implications for us and I think it points to a balance.

And that is the finiteness of creation. Again, something unique about the Bible's creation account and that is that there's only one source of the creation.

All other ancient accounts of creation have multiple deities where the world is created because they've been killing each other. It's some kind of battle.

[15 : 23] And the humanity was created, the world was created to serve the deities who were trying to kill each other. Here is an ancient account of creation where all of the elements are created.

No element of creation is divine in and of itself. God alone is divine. None of the creation is divine. God alone is infinite and to be worshipped.

Virtually all of the ancient religion worshipped parts of the creation because they saw them as sources of divine power linked to different deities.

So in the ancient world, there were some who were anti the created order. It was all about appeasing the angry gods. That's why creation existed. They were therefore against pleasure.

They were against enjoyment. They were against playfulness. On the other hand, in the ancient world, there was the materialists, which like modern secularists, who said that it's all that we've got and so we better make sure that we worship it, you know, and worship physical pleasure and wealth and power.

[16 : 37] The modern secularist says that this is all that we have, this created order, so consume as much of the material world in possession and experiences as you possibly can before you die.

The Christian worldview doesn't say that the material world is bad, nor does it say it's all you've got. You can do without it because God is the most important thing.

When the Christian grasps the goodness alongside the finiteness of creation, then you are able to truly enjoy it but also walk away from it.

That's why our holidays are so quickly forgotten because they're not the ultimate.

They're not meant to give you the rest that only God can give you. They're good but they're not ultimate. So the Christian is neither an ascetic nor a hedonist.

[17 : 55] The third thing we learn is the unity of creation. This is an interesting point. Well, interesting to me anyway. Way back in Greek philosophy, there was this tendency to a dualistic view of creation.

I've already mentioned it where there's good gods and bad gods. The material world was bad. The spiritual world was good. We see this thinking in fact.

Some of this thinking is behind the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians. Some Greek religions believed that there were two gods, one good and one bad. The interesting thing is that this dualistic view of the world has for some reason always hung around the Christian church.

There's elements there that have always hung around the Christian church despite the fact that it's actually not in the Bible. So many Christians these days are dualistic in their thinking and therefore they are consistently fearful.

Fearful of world events. Fearful that Satan may get the upper hand on me. Fearful of the spiritual realm.

[19 : 09] They consistently pit the spirit against the material world and therefore live in fear.

And therefore they view the world in both you're a good person if you have the Holy Spirit and you're a carnal person if you don't have the Holy Spirit.

Have the Holy Spirit I'm good if you don't then everyone else is wicked and terrible. God creates both the body and the spirit. Everything is his or wisdom is his or truth is his.

And so a great deal of humility those of you who are in Christ because you can learn an awful lot from those who are not. The last thing we learn here is the importance of creation.

God so loves the cosmos that is why John chapter 3 verse 16 says that he sent his son Jesus Christ to save it.

[20 : 16] God so loves the cosmos. He is so committed to his creation that he was willing for the eternal son to take on human flesh and to dwell here amongst us.

He is so committed to the cosmos that he will someday resurrect us and create a new heaven and a new earth. It means that when the Christian sees everything that has gone wrong in our world God's perfect creation we ought to be committed to renewing it in the same way that he is committed to renewing it.

When we see the goodness of creation we have a great deal of motivation to enjoy it. When we see the finiteness of creation we can handle not having a lot of it. When we see the unity of creation we can humbly learn from everyone and everything in it.

And because of the importance of creation we join in with God's renovation project through the proclamation of the gospel and works of mercy and justice in our world.

So lastly how therefore do we experience creation or potentially enjoying creation? creation. This is the last final point.

[21 : 31] I think it would be a mistake for me just to end it there where it was encourage you to go out and build a life around the biblical doctrine of creation. The last point is how do we actually truly experience God not just as our redeemer but as our creator.

Job chapter 38 God asked Job were you there when I laid the earth's foundation while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted joy.

Psalms 19 says the created order declares the glory of God. The reason why nature and the natural world is so moving for us is because it is doing what Job 38 says is doing what Psalm 19 says it is speaking to us.

That's its job it is speaking to us it is proclaiming something it is what it's doing according to Psalm 38 it is praising God and speaking to us consistently about the magnificence of God.

God but Romans chapter 1 tells us that even though creation reveals God a God of eternal power and divine nature humanity in our rebellion against God has suppressed that truth.

[23 : 08] It's like we're putting earbuds in as the creation sings to us. every human being knows God but no human being glorifies God or gives thanks to him is what Romans 1 tells us.

We don't acknowledge our dependence upon God our creator and we claim independence of him instead. But here's the thing again from Romans 1 because we are primarily made by God to worship God when we reject God we don't just simply stop worshipping we don't just simply stop believing as an atheist will want you to believe we don't stop that we just shift our allegiance to something else and worship it instead another object our purpose is worship and so there must be something that captures our attention and becomes our hope and our security and our identity and our meaning we give ultimate affection to a created thing a good thing made by God rather than the God who alone is worthy of our ultimate affection so rather than worshipping the immortal we worship what he has made and what the Bible tells us is that everything that's wrong in the created

world is linked to that issue alone that issue and the Bible tells us that God will hold us accountable for it but the Bible also tells us that God has done something about our biggest issue I'm not sure if you ever noticed this for those who have read in the New Testament and John's Gospel which we finished last week but John's Gospel begins in the same way that Genesis begins in the beginning was the word in the beginning was the word the Greek word that John uses there for word is the word logos and the Greek philosophers the word logos had very important word in Greek philosophy at the time the first century and John was writing this in Greek culture the Greek philosophers looked at nature they looked at the created order they saw balance they saw harmony they saw design in the world and they concluded that there was a cosmic principle of order behind the created world and they called that principle of order the logos of the world the logic of the world the logos is the purpose the reason the logic behind all things it's the thing that makes sense of all things and so as John begins his gospel he comes in with an earth shattering category the logos is not a principle it's a person the person is the designer the source of all life the one who we are to align our lives with in order for life to be lived well by us and we are told five things in

John chapter one about the logos the principle the person behind the universe firstly the logos is a person secondly the logos is a divine person thirdly the logos is an eternal divine person fifthly the logos is an eternal divine person who is the source of all life and did I say fifthly fifthly the logos is Jesus Christ now walking amongst us at his baptism you notice this in Genesis one God saw and it was good and then down in when he creates humanity made Adam God saw and it was very good very good and then the John says the logos is here at his baptism the Holy Spirit descends and we read that he heard a voice the voice was

God the father saying this is my child this is my son with whom I am well pleased do you know that is the first time since the garden of Eden that any human being has ever received the blessing of God it's the only other time it's happened where God looked and said I'm really happy with this one this is good this is my son it's the only time you're reading the Bible since the garden of Eden Jesus Christ God the son had the delight and the love of God let me fast forward to Easter but on the cross he cries out my God my God why have you forsaken me on the cross Jesus Christ was getting the curse the word of condemnation that we deserve for us worshipping the created order turning our backs on our created

[29 : 05] God Jesus took the curse so that we could get the blessing he became bad so that we might become very very good and receive the benediction of God the blessing of God Colossians 1 21 once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior but now he has reconciled you by Christ physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation you see if we believe the good news of Jesus Christ God the Lord God coming into the world to rescue us from our rejection of not just our redeemer but of our creator if we believe the good news of the Christian gospel then it becomes God's recreative word to us where he declares us as very good much loved the word of the gospel is what we receive from

God because of what Jesus has done for us in Jesus and only Jesus do we get the blessing of God we finally hear the affirmation of our creator you are very good you are my much loved daughter you are my much loved son with you I am well pleased forever you know what the doctrine of creation means the doctrine of not just creation but redemption in Christ it means that none of us because of the affirmation we receive in Jesus none of us needs to squeeze that affirmation out of our partners or out of our children or out of our vocation or out of our travel blogs or our assets or our education or our culture it is the affirmation that only our creator can give us and it's the affirmation that we all need the recreative word of the gospel goes deep into our hearts and it heals us from our innermost deepest hurts and it drives us out from there to be people healing God's world in the beginning was God in the end will be God he created the universe and he can make you new now have have you accepted Jesus Christ into your life not just as your redeemer but also as your creator it will have profound impact on how you live tomorrow season of park the underneath Idaho is you can you imagine