

Our Creator God

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[0 : 00] I remember it clearly.

The year was 1984. I was in ninth grade. And part of the church that I had been going to for the last six or seven years that my family went to.

When you get to ninth grade, it was confirmation year. And so that's what we did in Sunday school. And in that spring, we went on a confirmation retreat.

And on Saturday afternoon, our assignment was to sit around the table and to write a statement of faith. For the elders to approve so that we might become confirmed as members of the church.

Now, I will tell you that in my family, going to church was important. But believing in Jesus was not particularly. And so I remember looking at the youth pastor at that moment and saying, Well, what are we supposed to write?

[1 : 23] At that moment, for me, it was simply a test that I wanted to know the right answers to regurgitate. And not actually a real statement of faith.

This is not an indictment on the process of churches that may have confirmation. I think it can be done well. It was not done well in my case and this church. But at the same time, on the same retreat, that evening, I walked out of the retreat center and looked up in the clear western Pennsylvania sky on a crisp spring night and saw the amazing array of the stars in the sky.

And I wondered, could it be true? Is there really a God out there after all?

Maybe you've had experiences like that. I can think of other places that have evoked in me a similar response. We're sitting by Lake Bierstadt, looking up at the snow-capped peaks of the Rocky Mountains in Rocky Mountain National Park on a beautiful July day.

We're sitting on the beach in Kauai at sunset, watching the sun, the golden ball, slowly lower itself into the ocean, surrounded by this beautiful array of purples and yellows and oranges and reds.

[2 : 59] I remember one time I was flying to China, looking down out of the airplane on these incredibly craggy, snow-covered mountains as the sun came up behind the plane and the orange glow captured and reflected off the tops of the mountains.

Maybe that's happened to you too. It's awe-inspiring, isn't it? Sometimes it makes us feel very small and insignificant. Sometimes it fills us with joy and wonder.

Sometimes it makes us afraid as we face a transcendence that we cannot understand or control.

But I think for all of us, it raises a question.

Is there something more out there? Does God really exist? And as we encounter these things, as we live in this amazing world that we live in, it raises questions.

How did it come to be? What is our place in it? Where do we come from? Why are we here? And as you know, there are many competing answers to that question today in our world, just as there was in the ancient world that the book of Genesis was written in.

[4 : 23] But as we begin our series in Genesis this morning, in Genesis 1, we're going to see that as the book opens, in the midst of other voices at that time, just as today, we see a story that reveals God and answers some of those questions.

Genesis 1 invites us in, in the midst of these competing stories, to behold the God of the Bible and to see him at work in the creation of all things.

Now you might be thinking, why is this important? Or why was it written when it was? If you remember, and if you were here last week, Pastor Greg preached a great sermon that just introduced us to the whole book.

And I'm not going to repeat what he said last week. So, if you weren't here last week, and you intend to stick around for a while and listen, and even if you don't, go to our website, trinity-baptist.org, and go to the sermon archive, and find Pastor Greg's sermon from last week to

answer all the questions you have about authorship and context and the big picture of Genesis, so that you'll get to see it.

We won't cover those things. But as we come to this passage that attempts to answer some of these questions, we recognize that the context in which it was written was to the people of Israel as they were leaving Egypt and slavery and heading to a promised land that they had not seen or tasted yet.

[6 : 04] And you might imagine if you were an Israelite wandering around in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula for 40 years, you might be wondering, where is this all going?

We're following a God who's not taking us anywhere. Can we trust him? Is he good? Is he in control of this? What's going on? And it's in that context that we see this book written.

Written to tell us what happened at the very beginning. Written to assure us that the God of the Bible is in control. That he is sovereign.

That he is life-giving. And that he is good. And that brings us to Genesis 1. So we're going to read this together.

You can turn in your Bibles. This time, I know what page it's on. It's on page 1. So page 1 of your Bible is Genesis 1, and we're going to read this together.

[7 : 07] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And 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. God called the light day, and the darkness he called night.

And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day. And God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.

And God made the expanse, and separated the waters that were under the expanse, from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so.

[8 : 13] And God called the expanse heaven, and there was evening, and there was morning, the second day. And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.

And it was so. And God called the dry land earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called seas. And God saw that it was good.

And God said, Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit, in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.

And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seeds according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit, in which is their seed, each according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the third day. And God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to separate the day from the night, and let there be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years.

[9 : 25] And let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to give light upon the earth. And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, and the stars.

God set them in the expanse of the heavens, to give light on the earth, to rule over the day, and over the night, to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

And there was evening, and there was morning, the fourth day. And God said, Let the water swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth, across the expanse of the heavens.

And so God created the great sea creatures, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds. And every winged bird, according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.

[10 : 31] And there was evening, and there was morning, the fifth day. And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures, according to their kinds, livestock, and creeping things, and beasts of the earth, according to their kinds.

And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth, according to their kinds, and the livestock, according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground, according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them, And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit, you shall have them for food.

[11 : 55] And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.

And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because on it, God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. Let's pray together.

Father, Lord, as we come to this majestic text this morning, Lord, our minds are filled with the wonder of it.

[13 : 07] Our minds are filled with the questions that it raises in our hearts, in our lives. Lord, I pray this morning that you would help us this morning to make your word clear that we might hear it.

Lord, I pray for your help that I might speak it clearly. And Lord, that we would sit in awe and wonder what a wonderful creator you are.

Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So before we dive in, I simply want to say one other thing.

As we approach this text, we may have to ask ourselves a question, what kind of writing is this?

You might be asking a question, is this history? Should I read this like a New York Times article about an eyewitness reporter being able to tell you the facts of what happened by observation?

Some of you may be asking, is this a science textbook? Is this telling us about the processes and the means by which life was created and the way that the natural world works?

[14 : 18] Some of you may be asking a question, is this primarily theology? Is this to tell us about the character and nature of God in systematic categories? And some of you may be asking, well, there seemed to be an awful lot of repetition and structure.

This sounds like poetry to me. Giving us a metaphorical sense of God and creation, but maybe that glosses over the details.

Well, friends, this has been a great discussion and I could spend the rest of my morning talking about this, but I'm not going to. I am going to rather say this.

This, above all things, is a narrative account that has structure and progression, but does not always answer the questions that our modern world asks in the ways that we would ask it.

It is truth. But it is truth within the framework of God's revelation in a narrative story. Remember what I said earlier about how this was written so that the Israelites would understand where the world came from that they were living in and who the God was that they were following in him.

[15 : 38] Because, of course, above all, this passage is about God. God who is mentioned more than 30 times. God who is the sole actor in the entire chapter.

God who announced what he would do, commanded that it be done. He who separated and organized the creation.

He who gave it names. And he who saw it and evaluated it and called it good. It is about God in his work of creation.

And this is what we're going to think about this morning for the next few minutes. We see three things about God in this. That God is a sovereign creator. That he is a life-giving creator.

And that he is a good creator. So let's look at each of these in turn. First, God is a sovereign creator.

[16 : 40] Look with me back at verses 1 and 2. In the beginning, God, you now know the most important thing about the Bible. Before all things were, God was.

God preexisted all things. and all the things that we see and all the things that we know. The heavens and the earth, which is meant to be descriptive of everything, inclusive of the entire created world, universe.

God was before all those things. And as God began to engage in this process of creation, he engaged in, as verse 2 says, a world that was without form and void.

I want you to think about what that means. There was no structure. There was no order. There was no way to wrap your hand, wrap your arms around it and understand it because it was without form. And it was a void. That is, it was empty. And in those things, God stepped in to create something out of a shapeless void.

[18:10] And he created, as we see, as it goes on, all things. The things in the heavens and the things on earth. The things that the peoples around the nation of Israel would have worshipped.

The sun, the moon, the stars. The lesser gods that they worshipped who said, I'm the God of the harvest who can bring forth plants.

I'm the God of fertility who can help you be fruitful and multiply. This account says, all of these come from this pre-existent God.

And this pre-existent God is not merely one who sits back and is distant from the God. But we see in verse 2 as it keeps going, that the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

This is an image that we see later in Deuteronomy about God's care for his creation. It's an image that evokes a picture of a mother eagle hovering over her nest with her fledglings, urging them to arise and to fly.

[19:28] And this is what God is doing with his creation. And we see that God has the power to create. The beginning of verse 3, and God said.

And this is one of the most remarkable things about this God revealed in this Bible is that this God can do whatever he wants simply with the power of his own word.

Every day he speaks and God said and it was so. And God said and it was so. And God said and it was so. And as we read in John 1 earlier, all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

And I know you're asking what about the process? Did it take a millennia? Six 24 hour literal days? Was it ex nihilo instantaneous?

Did God use means? It's an interesting question. How does this match with the scientific discoveries and theories that we live in today?

[20:48] Sorry, I'm going to punt on this one too. It's a great question. It's an important question. But it's why rather than spending all of our time in a sermon dealing the details, Pastor Greg and Danielle Speller, who's a physicist, will be doing a two-week Sunday school class at the end of September after Tom's class on New Testament reliability.

If you're interested in those questions, plan to go. That's where many of those questions will be addressed as they address broadly the question of how science and faith integrate together.

But just to give a little bit of perspective on that question, you know, when John Calvin, the great reformer, wrote about creation, this is secondhand, but I believe it's true, that he actually asked the question not why did it take God so short in this account.

We wrestle with could God have actually done this briefly because we think we live in a world that takes long processes. Calvin's question was why did it take a whole day or a whole week for God to create?

Can't he just speak and it happens all of it at once? God didn't have to say and God said and God said and God said. He could have just said it once and God said let it be and there it was.

[22:10] Everything all at once. So just as a bit of historical perspective, the questions that we ask of these texts are often brought to us by the context in which we live and this is why history is important for us to read.

Having said that, the Bible speaks to many scientific questions but we must see that what the Bible speaks to is more than just science.

It answers greater questions as it may answer some of the science questions along the way. And what we see is that God is bringing order to his creation and he is ruling over it.

This God who is not a part of creation but who is engaged with his creation, who sits above it, not as a part of it but who rules over it, he has taken from emptiness and formlessness and darkness and he has filled it in creation.

Before we go on and think about that process a little more, let's think briefly about applying, if these things are true, if God is a sovereign ruler, what does it mean?

[23 : 33] The first thing it means is that we must cling to and understand this truth. There is nothing that is outside of God's sovereign rule in the world.

world. There is no random chance over time in a closed system that God is not ruling over. There are no stars aligning in the heavens to determine the fate of our lives that God is not ruling over.

The processes that mother nature produces in the wonders that we see in planet earth and David Attenborough's video series. None of those exist except that God rules over them.

In the ancient Near East, they would be struck by the fact that there is no titanic struggle between good and evil. There is no yin and yang striving for control of the world.

world. But all that we see, God is ruling over it. For those of you who are sci-fi fans, there is no force.

[24 : 47] There are no mitochondrians. There is nothing that God does not rule over, whether mythical or real. So we must see that if God is the one who rules over all things, it also means that he rules over all things in our lives.

He rules over the hurricanes that swirl in the Caribbean. And he rules over the details of our medical conditions. He rules over the chaos that we hear reported week in and week out in the news.

He rules over our lives from the global to the minutia. He is sovereign. And he calls us to trust him in that.

And thirdly, he calls us as his sovereign to cultivate a humility before him. For because he is the creator and not simply a part of the creation, because he is distinct and over us and the source of it, then we are in fact answerable to him.

We are not our own little gods. We are not the captains of our own ship who are able to determine our destinies on our own. The myth of the independent human who can do anything is humbled by this account.

[26 : 17] Instead, as the apostle Paul preached in Athens, it is in God that we live and move and have our being. We are dependent and we are accountable to him.

So we see that God is a sovereign ruler who in power created all things. But we see more than that. He is not just reigning over us, but he is filling his creation with life.

He is a life-giving creator. From formless and void to form and filled, this is God's work. If you have a bulletin, you can pull this out.

This is a time to look at the little chart that is in your bulletin to give you a sense of the framework of how this passage in its, yes, somewhat poetic form of repetition.

And God said, and it was so, let there be, and he separated, and he saw that it was good, and there was morning, and there was evening. There is this literary structure that helps us see this.

[27 : 24] And then we see that there are in three days, the first three days, the form is brought together. Light and darkness. Sky and sea.

Don't get all confused by the waters above and the waters below and expanse and firmament and these words that you've never heard before. It's very easy. Skies, seas. That's what day two is about.

Day three, dry land is separated. And in each of these, we see these pairings. Light and darkness. Sky and sea.

Earth and water. Separated. Given boundaries. Given places. Given purposes. There are no rogue elements in this created world.

And it would have been very comforting to the Israelites at the time, as many people around them believed that these natural forces were out of control and were fearsome and overwhelmed them.

[28 : 29] after God creates this form, takes what is formless and gives it form.

He then fills it. The void is no longer void, but he begins to fill it with life. He creates trees that will propagate themselves because they have seeds in them.

fruit trees and plants. The end of day three. And then in day four, he fills them with living beings.

This is actually the word in Hebrew.

It's a word for it that's used later in the Old Testament for souls. Now we know that it's broader than that. It doesn't only mean that. But what it does mean is that these living beings have a unique characteristic, distinct from plants.

I'll just say that. Distinct from plants in some way, whereby there's this life that God is now filling it with. Now, day four goes back to the heavens, doesn't it?

[29 : 34] And he fills. He fills it with light. With the actual things that give off light. He'd already created light and now he fills it with sun and moon and stars.

The things that we know give light. Then day five, the living creatures. Each according to their kind. Not random. Not haphazard. But orderly. God creates. He fills the skies with the flying things. He fills the seas with the swimming things.

I love the way that this translation, let the water swarm with swarms of things. There's this idea that life is teeming. Have you ever walked into an aviary?

You're walking outside. You have normal life sounds around you. You walk into an aviary and there usually, if you've ever been to one, there's usually two doors, right? So that the birds don't fly out.

[30 : 37] So you walk through the first one, you close the back door and then you walk through the second one to get the, and then you walk in and suddenly you're in a room and all you hear is chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp.

It's almost, it's almost overwhelming the amount of noise that you hear when you walk into that. And you see these little flits of life as the birds move around.

And the more you look, the more you see that the room is filled with birds. Some more active, some less active. just a taste of what it must have looked like.

Just a taste of what God was doing as he was, as he was filling the world with teeming with this life that was ever expanding and ever growing.

Because just like the plants, these were set, were told to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. God's creation of life was not terminal but abundant and expansive and expounding.

[31 : 41] And the pinnacle of it all, of course, the end of day six, he creates human beings. Man, male and female.

In God's image. Distinct from and yet still created beings who have a role to rule over all of this life that he has filled the world with.

And their rule, which has been sorely abused, we'll get to that in the next couple of weeks, I believe. But the rule that has been sorely abused, the rule was that they might cultivate it and care for it so that it might have more life.

That human beings would come and bring greater order so that life would flourish more. This was God's intention in creating. And this is the life-giving God that we see in Genesis 1.

Do you believe this is true? That life really does come from God?

[32 : 55] More importantly, that God is able to bring life. We can get so distracted by means and timelines and forget again what John 1 says.

That in him was life. And that life was the light of men. Scientists keep working to create life. They're getting closer. I did a little bit of research this week. I'm not a scientist. I'm not really equipped to do this. They're getting closer.

But it was interesting to see how the articles even now describe they created something like or getting closer to. And you know, even if human beings do begin to create life, wouldn't that be fitting that we who are in the image of God would be able to follow in his footsteps and take the creation that he has made and learn how to be life producers?

There are all sorts of ethical questions. I'm not talking about that. I'm just talking about the fact that God created this world to abound in life. And it comes from him.

[34 : 09] He is the life-giving creator. He is the source of life. Without him, there would not be any life. What are the applications of this for us?

Well, we could be here all day. But the one that I want to focus on this morning for a minute is just that because because of this, we have hope. We have hope that the darkness that covered the earth is not the final end.

But it is out of darkness that God created light. And in the darkness, God brings life. Means that there is hope for those who are facing death.

Many of you are young. Not all of you. But many of you are young. Haven't thought much about that yet.

Some of you are young and have already thought about it far too much. But when you are facing death, to know the God who is the author of life, who is the life-giving creator, gives us great hope.

[35 : 22] The fact that God created form and filled it with life gives us hope when we feel like our life is chaos without form and void.

When we feel like that's true externally, whether that's true internally in our hearts. God is a life-giving creator and it is his delight to not only create the world, but to continue to cultivate and to expand that life in this world for his glory.

Think of the words that the apostle Paul write in Ephesians 2. But you who were dead in your sins and trespasses, God made you alive in Christ and raised you up with him.

This is our hope. That God is a life-giving God. Not only is he the sovereign ruler, not only is he a life-giving creator, but he is a good creator.

He does all things well. This point is very simple. We don't need to spend a lot of time expounding on it, but simply to say that God looked at his creation and as he did it, as he created the form and as he filled it with life, he saw it and it was good.

[36 : 54] And he saw it and it was good. And he saw it and it was good. And he saw it and it was good. And he saw it and it was good. And he saw it and it was good. And when he was finished, he saw it and it was and it was very good.

and friends I think we live with a serious case of forgetfulness about how good that was and of course we would because we don't live in a world that doesn't express that goodness one commentator Tremper Longman who wrote a great book on how to read the book of Genesis if you ever want that it's a short accessible introduction to the book says this this is important because the early Israelites the original readers of this creation account would not have experienced the world as entirely good and the same is true today the creation account informs and ensure assures us that the world as created by God was good and friends though we experience the world is not always good today yet we still do don't we we still taste the goodness of it we taste it in those moments where we interact with creation and we are awed and overwhelmed by its beauty and its majesty and its splendor we taste it when and I know many of you are scientists in this room when you look through the microscope and you see the amazing thing that God created and the incredible intricacy and delicacy of how God made that work you see it in the creativity of human beings who in God's image make art and music and literature who act and perform and sing who do these things in reflection of this original goodness goodness and though it is not as good as it was we can still taste it and remember that it is true and friends we see his goodness in the final day don't we after having said it was very good

God then rested he rested from all his work now we need to see that in the greater picture of this and when God gave the law in Sinai book of Exodus the creation story was because God rested from his works in the seventh day we too are to observe a Sabbath and to rest from our works recognize that this is again a counter story against some of the ancient near eastern stories where human beings in the form of creation as the gods were taking control of the world were seeking to do so so that they could enslave human beings and make them work for them all the time that is not a life-giving God and it is not good but here we see God's goodness in his life-giving gift of this seventh day where he rested from his work rest so that we can enjoy God's creation and its goodness rest so that we can enjoy God himself

God did not rest because he was tired or because he was bored or because he was bored or because he was out of ideas God rested so that he might enjoy the works that he created and to model for us and to set a pattern for us to live that we too might find rest in him and that rest that he invites us into the rest of enjoying his creation is something that then as the Bible plays itself out will be a beautiful rest with God forever in his presence and in his good creation when he redeems and recreates the world for himself we know this is true we see it see it and we've read it in John already but let me remind you again it's going to memorize just quote it but I might mess it up so I'll just read it so we don't mess it in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God he was in the beginning with God all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made in him was life and the life was the light of men and the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it friends this is the good news is that God who created the world that we might see and enjoy his goodness has come as the redeemer of the world so that he might restore it to its goodness to a greater glory in fact in heaven through this one Jesus the light who has come to banish the darkness of sin and death and the one who will in eternity be our light and be our life the sovereign ruler bridges the gap between him and us by entering in to his creation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ he comes so that he might be a life

giving savior to all who believe in him that we might be rescued from the death of our sin and our rebellion against God and he comes so that as we are raised to new life with him we may know his goodness now and for all eternity this is the gospel this is the good news of Jesus Christ this is the end of the story that Genesis 1 begins let's pray

Lord I pray this morning that you would capture us with the awe of what a creator God you are and that this world that you have made Lord is Lord an expression of your creative sovereignty and your creative life giving power and your creative goodness Lord I pray that we might have assurance and confidence in you today in whatever we are facing in whatever we are walking through that this is the God who rules and reigns over all things and over our lives for your glory and for our good we pray in Jesus name Amen well friends it would be fitting for us as we as we close to observe communion the Lord's Supper we come to this table in order to remember what it is that God did to redeem us how it is that he has come ultimately to be our life giving savior we celebrate by drinking by eating a cracker at that tolerated by eating a cracker

[45 : 01] O to be SD can expose a cracker and over to be have