

God's Good Creation: Genesis 1:1-31
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In last week's sermon I asked the question: Why did God create? He didn't create this universe because He needed us in any way. God has no need. He has no lack. Before the foundation of the world, God was perfectly happy within the fellowship of the Trinity. For all eternity, the true God has existed as One God in three Persons. And therefore He has never been bored. He has never been lonely. And He didn't create this universe because He needed anything. Instead, He created this universe as an overflow of His delight in Himself. God is a fountain, and His happiness cannot be contained. He overflows, and His joy spills over to display His greatness. In creation God went public with His glory. He wanted to manifest His greatness in a spectacular way. That is WHY God created. He created us and all things for His own glory.

This week I want to look more closely at Genesis 1 and talk about HOW God created and WHAT He created. First of all, I want to talk about the fact that He created out of nothing. What can we learn about God based on the amazing truth that He created all that is out of absolutely nothing? I also want to talk about the climax of what God created, which is humankind. What does it mean that we are created in God's image, and what is our unique role in God's creation? These are the things I want us to study and marvel at this morning.

First of all, God created out of nothing. The very first words of the Bible make this clear. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Before this, nothing existed except God. There was no universe, no earth, no material reality whatsoever. And God created. Verse 3 gives a vivid example of how God spoke things into existence by the power of His word. God didn't have to labor and struggle in order to bring things into existence. He simply spoke, and there was. Verse 3, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." This is the God we serve. This is the One true and living God. The God who effortlessly and powerfully commands light into existence. Throughout chapter 1 of Genesis God gives these commands as He creates and orders His creation. Verse 6, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters . . ." Verse 9, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." Verse 11, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit . . ." Verse 14, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night." Verse 20, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." Verse 24, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds." God created all that is out of nothing. He commanded, and the universe came into being. Then He gave further commands, and the universe was formed and organized according to His good plan.

What do we learn about God based on the fact that He created this universe out of nothing? We know that He is sovereign over His creation. The power of His word displayed in creation reminds us that His word is still powerful today. He is in absolute control over His creation. He can make the sun stand still, if He wants to, like He did for Joshua when the Israelites were fighting the Amorites (Joshua 10). God is in control of the sun and the moon, the weather and the seasons.

On Friday we were outside and I was talking to our daughter Milaina about springtime, and how God is making the leaves grow and the flowers bloom. And Milaina said, "When Jesus comes back to earth we can ask Him why He tricked us a couple times." I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "Like when He made it snow even though it was already starting to be summertime." It has been an interesting spring this year, and so I talked about how God can make it snow when He wants to, and He can make it sunny when He wants to. He's in control. God is sovereign over His creation.

We can also understand from this that God alone is eternal. Matter is not eternal. This universe is not eternal. It all had a starting point. It had a beginning. But God has no beginning. He has always existed. The Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has existed for ever and ever. God alone is eternal.

God is also distinct from creation. This universe is not an emanation of God. It is not an extension of His Being. The creation is not part of who God is. Pantheism is the belief that everything is god. You and me, the pew you're sitting on, the grass and trees, are all part of divine reality. God is everything, and everything is god. But the biblical doctrine of creation rules out pantheism. The true God, who has always existed, created something entirely distinct from Himself. Out of nothing, He made this universe. And it's extremely important for us to understand this distinction between the Creator and the creation. In Romans 1 where Paul describes the sinful condition of mankind, he writes, "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Rom 1:24-25). God is the Creator. He alone is eternal. He is not to be confused in any way with the creation. And He alone is to be praised. Creatures do not deserve our worship. Only the Creator is worthy of our worship.

Let me draw two applications for us from this point about God's creation. The first is that we should enjoy God's creation. We should delight in what He has made. We shouldn't worship the creation in any way. But we should worship God for this amazing universe that He created out of nothing, and we should find joy in His handiwork. God delights in His creation, and so should we.

Throughout Genesis 1 we see God's delight in what He has made. Six times the text tells us that God saw that it was good. Then, in verse 31, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." God was not indifferent about what He had made. It brought Him great joy as His delight in Himself overflowed to make this wonderful universe.

Psalm 104, which reflects on God's great acts in creation, says, "May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works, who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke!" (vv. 31-32). The Lord delights in His creation. He rejoices in what He has made, because it is a display of His glory. Then the psalmist goes on, "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord" (vv. 33-34). The psalmist rejoices in God's creation, but that delight is a delight in the Lord Himself. This is how we ought to enjoy creation. We should stop and smell the roses, and stare at the trees and marvel at the ocean and the mountains and the stars, and praise God for what he has made.

Clyde Kilby, who was a literature professor at Wheaton College, had several resolutions for how he could keep his eyes open to see God's glory. In one of those resolutions he resolved, "At least once every day I shall look steadily up at the sky and remember that I, a consciousness with a conscience, am on a planet traveling in space with wonderfully mysterious things above and about me" (quoted in Piper, *Pleasures of God*, 95). Our amazement at all these things ought to inspire in our hearts a great enjoyment of God. He is the One who made all of this. He fashioned each unique animal. He painted the sunrise and the sunset. He placed the stars in the sky. He is an awesome Creator, and we ought to rejoice in His creation as part of our enjoyment of Him.

Some people have the unbiblical notion that the material world is inherently evil. They think spiritual things are good, but material things are bad. Therefore we should forsake all physical, material pleasure, and only focus on spiritual things. There's an element of truth there, of course, because we want our main focus to be on God rather than His creation. However, we must never fall into thinking that God's creation is evil. Even though sin has entered the created order and has perverted so many things, God's creation is still good, and it is here for our enjoyment.

The false teachers in Ephesus were promoting this idea that physical pleasures are wrong, and Paul clearly warned against such thinking. In 1 Timothy 4 he refers to those "who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (v. 3). Then he writes, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (v. 4). And in chapter 6 Paul refers to God as the One "who richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (v. 17).

Brothers and sisters, we need not become ascetics. We need not think that physical pleasures will make us less spiritual. God's creation is good, and it is here for our enjoyment. So enjoy watching the sunset. Enjoy going to the zoo and seeing God's marvelous creatures. Enjoy food. If you're married, enjoy sexual intimacy with your spouse. Enjoy music. Enjoy the arts. Enjoy humor and laughter. And enjoy all these things as gifts from God. May our enjoyment of these things be part of our enjoyment of God.

The second point of application that I want to make here is that we should praise God, not only because He created this physical universe out of nothing, but also because He can create spiritual life out of nothing. Paul makes this connection in 2 Corinthians 4:6, where he writes, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." What a rich verse, and what a rich analogy between how God created light out of darkness and how He creates light in our dark hearts. You see, before God works in our hearts, we have no inclination to believe in Him. Our hearts are filled with darkness, and our spiritual eyes are blind. Just a couple verses earlier Paul wrote, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (v. 4). That is the spiritual condition of unbelievers. No knowledge of God's true greatness. No delight in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No willingness to believe. No ability to believe. Just a hard heart dead set against God, blind to His glory, blind to the foolishness of turning away

from Him, blind to the joy that is found in Him. It's into that spiritual nothingness that God says, "Let there be light." And there is light.

If you're saved this morning, that's how you got saved. If you are trusting Jesus, it's because God created light out of darkness in your heart. He regenerated your heart. He gave you spiritual eyes to see His beauty. He gave you a heart that delights in Him. He freed your will from its complete bondage to sin. And now you love the Gospel, because God did this amazing work of creation in your heart.

So far I've been talking about the fact that God created out of nothing. And from this we understand that God alone is sovereign, He alone is eternal, He is distinct from His creation, and He alone is worthy of our worship. We also understand that God delights in His creation, and we should delight in His creation as well. And then we see this beautiful analogy between His creation of the physical universe, and His creation of spiritual life in our hearts.

The second main point that I want to focus on now is God's creation of mankind. Look at Genesis 1: 26-27, "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."

What does it mean that we, as human beings, male and female, are created in the image of God? First of all, I think it's very evident from Genesis 1 that humankind is a special and unique piece of God's creation. We are distinct from the animals. No other part of creation was made in God's image, after God's likeness. So the fact that we bear God's image is something special about us that sets us apart from the monkeys. As wonderful as monkeys are, and even though they may have some superficial similarities to humans, we are entirely distinct because of this fact that we are created in God's image.

We are like God in many ways. Not identical, of course. God is in a category of His own. But God made us to resemble Him in many ways. In Genesis 5:3 the same two words are used: likeness and image. It says, "When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." Seth was not identical to his father. They didn't share all the same characteristics. But they were alike in many ways. And that is what God is saying about His creation of mankind. He chose to make us with many of the same attributes that He has.

For instance, we are spiritual beings. Each of us has a soul as well as a body, and our souls will live forever. We are rational beings. We can think abstractly and use reason and logic in ways that animals cannot. We are creative, modeling God's creativity. We cannot create out of nothing, like He can. But humans can produce amazing works of art and build beautiful buildings and invent useful tools and machines. Many things animals are incapable of doing. We are also moral beings. We have a moral conscience which gives us a sense of what is right and wrong. We are personal and relational, modeling the fellowship within the Trinity, which I think is alluded to when God says in verse 26, "Let *us* make man in *our* image after *our* likeness."

In all these ways we are like God, and distinct from the rest of creation. We are uniquely made to reflect God's character and to rule over God's universe. God made us like Him so that we would represent Him and mirror forth His glory in this world, and

also so that we would be His stewards of His creation. Do you see that in verse 26, “And let them have dominion . . .” Then in verse 28, “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.’” We were created to be kings and queens over creation.

But all these ways in which we were created in God’s image were severely affected by the Fall. Physically, mentally, spiritual, morally, we are thoroughly corrupted by sin. We continue to bear the image of God, but it is tainted. In our sin, we cannot mirror forth God’s glory in the same way Adam and Eve could before the Fall. Neither can we rule over creation in the way Adam and Eve did before the Fall. Much has been lost.

Yet God has a plan for regaining what was lost. He sent His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to earth as the perfect display of God’s image, “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,” (Heb 1:3). Jesus is God-in-flesh, and He lived a holy, perfect, God-glorifying life. He showed us what it means to bear God’s image. Jesus Christ is the image of God, and it’s only in Him that we have any hope of regaining the fullness of God’s image in our lives.

As an unbeliever, a person still bears *some* mark of God’s image, but when God saves a person, he or she will begin to be conformed more and more into Christ’s likeness. 2 Corinthians 3:18, speaking of believers, says, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same *image* from one degree of glory to another.” We will become increasingly like Christ as we are sanctified, and thus God’s image will be more and more evident in our lives.

Still, it will not be until Christ returns that we will fully display God’s image in our lives. 1 John 3:2 says, “when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

So we were originally created in God’s image. That image was severely distorted in the Fall. Jesus Christ came to perfectly display God’s image, and those who trust in Him will gradually be conformed more and more into that image, still imperfectly in this life, then perfectly in the life to come.

I’ll close with two points of application related to being made in God’s image. The first is that all human beings are equal as bearers of God’s image. No matter what age or gender or skin color or intelligence level or financial status, we all have equal worth and value in God’s eyes. This should transform the way we view one another. There should be no favoritism or sexism or racism among us. All of us are created equal in the image of God. Therefore we should treat every person with respect and honor and kindness, if for no other reason, simply because they are a human being created in the image of God. This truth should also cause us to fight against injustices that are done toward the weak and powerless. Abortion is wrong, because the unborn baby has value and worth as a bearer of God’s image. Euthanasia is wrong, because every person, no matter how weak or ill, still bears God’s image. Slavery, which is still practiced in various ways around the world, is wrong, because a person made in God’s image must not be treated as a piece of property. All forms of abuse are wrong, whether it’s toward children, or spouse, or co-worker, or classmate. We need to respect one another, and treat all persons with dignity, because we are NOT animals. We are beings created in

God's image, and therefore every human being is infinitely more precious than any other part of creation.

A second point of application is that we ought to live as bearers of God's image. We are here to bring glory to God. We are here to reflect His glory, His holiness, His purity. How well is your life reflecting the glory of God? In what ways is your life a testimony to God's character? When we sin, we distort the portrayal of God's image. But as we strive for holiness, and pursue a greater delight in God, we will grow more and more like the One whom we behold. And as a result we will experience more joy in life, and the beauty of God's greatness will be more clearly seen in our lives. As we behold the glory of the Lord, we will be transformed into His image from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).