

A Theology of Creation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 September 2023

Preacher: Jack Gamble-Smith

[0 : 00] I'll just start by saying we're starting, as Derek said, we're starting a new series in the doctrine of creation and the implications on the way we live in the world, the way we see the world around us.

And this topic throughout this semester will lead us into many other related topics like creation and, I mean, yeah, creation in science, creation in culture, maybe gender, all these sort of things. It makes sense of a lot of related ideas that it will explore. But tonight we're just going to kind of lay a foundation of what the doctrine of creation actually is and why it matters for all of us here today. And if your experience maybe was anything like mine, which I'm not sure any of yours was because I grew up on the other side of the world, many times when I would see a church doing a series on creation, I would expect to show up and I would see expect to see like pictures of dinosaur bones, maybe bones even in the service, talks about carbon dating, the age of the earth, maybe tracing genealogies through maps, figuring out how old actually is the earth and how long are these days. In other words, much of our time, at least in the, in where I grew up and I think a lot of our churches spent defending a biblical view of creation, of defending the, what the Bible has to say about creation and figuring out, trying to defend that it's actually true.

[1 : 30] And at least in my experience, less time has been spent articulating how God's creation of the world actually informs the way we live in the world and the way we see the world and the way we make sense of who we are as humans.

So unfortunately there will be no dinosaur bones tonight. And I'm not going to get into debates of the age of the earth, I know very little about carbon dating.

My goal is much more modest tonight. I just want to attempt a concise definition of the doctrine of creation. So just try to define what is actually the doctrine of creation and just explain it and unpack it a little bit and maybe just give you a few biblical examples of why this is actually really, really practical and important for us as the church to understand as we live our lives.

So that's all we're going to do. So first let's try for a definition. And this is where if you have your Bibles, I'm going to ask you actually not to open it up to Genesis 1. I'm going to ask you, which you probably think we're going to spend the whole time in, open to the other side of your Bibles. Let's start in Revelation just to keep things spicy and turn to Revelation chapter 4. And I think this passage, by kind of starting at the end, it'll help us to inform our definition just a little bit.

[2 : 52] And what's happening as you're turning there in Revelation chapter 4 is John is getting a glimpse. It says John chapter 4, I mean Revelation chapter 4 verse 1. He's looking and beholds a door standing open in heaven.

So he sees a doorway into heaven and he sees the throne room of God himself. And if you look down at verse 10, what he sees around the throne of God are the 24 elders.

And these 24 elders are basically just a representation of the church, the global, historical, unified, small sea Catholic church, not Roman Catholic, but unified body of Christ representing the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 apostles gathered around the throne of God.

And what are they doing in verse 10? They're worshipping him. And the question is what is the content, what's going on in heaven? What are they worshipping him for?

For all of eternity. What are they worshipping him for? And verse 11 makes that really clear. They say worthy are you. This is the whole church, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.

[4 : 09] And then you see that word for. This is why. You created all things. And by your will, they existed and were created.

So I just kind of want to look at what they're praising God for and pull out just three things that will help us to construct a definition of the doctrine of creation.

The first thing is the most obvious thing that we can all say, which they're saying is that God created all things. God created all things. And this is what our catechisms say.

God created all things from nothing. And they're praising him. And how does he create all things? He says by your will, his will, he spoke the universe into existence by his very willing it into existence.

He spoke and from nothing, everything came into existence within the space of six days. And then he rested. That's the first thing. So the first thing that we would say when we construct a doctrine of creation is that God created everything.

[5 : 13] And look again at verse two, I mean, sorry, at verse 11. And he says by your will, they, which refers to all things existed or exist and were created.

And if you look at that word, exist or existed, in other words, it's not just a doctrine of creation is not just that God created everything, but that those things exist.

In other words, that those things, he's upholding them. He's preserving them. He's sustaining everything that he's created. So it's not as if he just creates and then lets it run its course, but he creates it.

And then it says by your will. In other words, the will of God is involved not only in the act of creation, but in the sustaining, the preserving, the watching over a creation itself.

So those are the two aspects I would say. And the third one is, is maybe even more obvious. But if you just think about what's going on here in Revelation chapter four, it's that the doctrine of creation is a matter of worship.

[6 : 15] It's a matter of worship. It's a doxological matter. You might use the big word for that. In other words, this is a doctrine not primarily to be debated among scientists, not to create divisions.

It's, it's, while those things can be helpful, this is a matter that we worship God for. This is what will be in heaven. This is what the church in heaven triumphant now is doing is there worshipping God for being the creator.

And what I mean, so anyway, I just want to talk about basically those three things. What it means for him to create, to sustain his creation and what it means that work, that creation is a matter of worship. So that's what we're going to talk about.

So just to reiterate creation has at least maybe three aspects in the definition that I'm, that I'm going for. God's actual creating of the world from nothing and his upholding of his creation by his will.

So let's look at those things in order. First the very active creation and why that matters for us. The very active creation and why that matters for us. And my goal here tonight is to think as practically as we can about the doctrine of creation, because I think it actually really helps us make sense of things.

[7 : 25] And in order to do that, we have to ask how does the fact that God created the world influence the way that we live our lives? And I wonder if you're here and if someone, if someone in this room were to come to you and want to go out to coffee with you and said, you know, I'm really struggling in my Christian life.

How many of you the first instinct you would have would say, turn in your, let's, let's turn in our Bibles to Genesis chapter one. And let's think about creation. I'm probably not many of us.

That's never really been my instinct before. But the doctrine of creation is actually what God uses, at least in one instance, to interact with someone who's hurting.

Now I want you to turn in your Bibles to another place that you probably aren't going to expect that I ask you to turn to. And that's the book of Job. If you turn to the book of Job, in particular Job chapter three, just to give you context, because you probably all know Job chapter one and two is when Job's life utterly falls apart within the space of about 20 verses.

Job loses everything he holds dear, essentially. He loses his, his children, he loses his, his animals, his home, he loses his health.

[8 : 42] And we look in Job chapter two, and we see Job sitting on top of the ashes of his burnt life, basically, scraping his wounds with, with, with broken pots.

I mean, this is as low as you could possibly get. And then you look at chapter three and Job opens his mouth. And what does Job actually say in chapter three?

He says, after this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He cursed the day of his birth.

And let's just keep reading. And Job said, let the day perish on which I was born in the night that said a man is conceived. Let that day be turned, be darkness.

May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it. Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it. Let the blackness of the day terrify it.

[9 : 44] Have you noticed about that? Do you notice the imagery of light and darkness coming through of, of darkness rolling in? In verse nine, Job calls for the darkening of the stars, the darkening of the dawn, for the closing, he says, of the eyelids of the morning.

What is Job, what is Job cursing? What is Job asking for? In some ways he's almost saying, I want creation to be undone. I want the morning sun to be darkened.

I want the dawn not to come. I want what was light to become darkness. You see, God says, let there be light in Genesis one. And Job says, let gloom and deep darkness roll in.

And you remember how the creation account ends in Genesis one with rest. And look at the last verse of this chapter. Job says, I have no rest.

I have no rest. In other words, creation isn't working and I want it to be undone. I want it to be reversed. And just notice that Job isn't talking about creation just in general.

[10 : 58] He's talking about the day of his birth. Look at verse three. He said, let the day perish on which I was born. Let that day be darkness.

In his pain, Job in essence became the center of his universe. He wanted to undo all of creation because it was no longer very good for him.

And I wonder if you've ever been confused by the way God answers Job in the book of Job. If you turn to Job 38, I've often been confused because I feel like God isn't really answering the questions that Job is asking.

I mean, just think about it. If you lost all those things in your life, if you lost your children and in your career and all of these things, and then someone started to talk to you about sea beasts and billy goats, you might feel like you're not really being heard at this point in your life, maybe, is an understatement.

But if we remember that Job's wish was that creation would undo itself, God's answer will actually make more sense of why he speaks to Job the way he does.

[12 : 09] And the first words out of God's mouth are in reference to Job's call for the darkening of Genesis 1. Look at what God says to him in chapter 38. He says, who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

And God starts to talk to him for chapters and chapters about creation. He gives him ultimately a doctrine of creation. He asks him the first, the second question he asked him is in verse 4, where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

And the dominant question of God's speech is who? Who was actually there in the beginning? Who stands at the center of all of creation? Who controls all of creation?

Is it you, Job? Are you really the center of the universe? Who stands at the center of the universe? In other words, what does the Lord do to Job? He dissenters him. He moves him out of the center of the stage of the universe. And the Lord says, I created this.

[13 : 19] He gives him a doctrine of creation that says in the beginning, God, I was in the beginning. I stand at the center of all of this. In essence, he tells Job, Job, if you want to make sense of your pain, if you want to make sense of yourself, you cannot begin with yourself.

You need to move yourself out of the center of the universe and begin with Genesis one in the beginning, God. You need to begin with God as the creator of all things.

In other words, what I'm trying to show by this is the doctrine of creation is immensely, immensely practical. But God used in the hardest, most painful of counseling rooms of history because Job needs to be reminded that to make sense of pain, to make sense of life in general, he needed to remember to start with the view of God as creator and sustainer, not himself.

And how does the speech of, how does the book of Job end? How does the speech of God end? It ends with Job falling on his face, Job repenting in dust and in ashes. It ends with Job bowing down before God.

It ends just like Revelation 4 is, is portraying. In other words, this is where it's all leading is to looking at creation and bowing before God in worship and saying, you are the center of all of this,

not me.

[14 : 41] Again, like I said, the doctrine of creation is a matter of worship, not of debate. It's a matter of who sits at the center of your universe. So anyway, back to our definition and then we'll move on.

The doctrine of creation is not just that God created the world out of nothing. As God tells Job, he did, but it's that he sustains and upholds his creation. So that's the second point.

We'll just move to the second part of our definition, sustaining. Okay. Now we can finally move to Genesis chapter one. Genesis chapter one.

And as you know, all throughout the creation account, the word that keeps being repeated, there are several words that keep being repeated, but the one I want to talk about is the idea of the word good.

God keeps creating something and then immediately after creating it, he says, it's good. And then he ends his creation, culminates it, crowns it by saying, very good.

[15 : 40] And the word good, as simple of a word as it is. In writing class, they say never use the word good, but the word good becomes dominant for the book of Genesis.

It kind of becomes a main anchor for the book of Genesis, the idea of goodness. And the reason it does that is because you don't have to read very far in Genesis to see the unraveling of this goodness.

The serpent challenges, what is the serpent challenge? He challenges the goodness of God. What does the fall do? The fall of Mars, the goodness of man's heart.

What does the murder do? It corrupts. It puts blood on man's hands. You see corruption is seeping to every corner so, so, so, so quickly.

It's like whiplash after reading Genesis one and seeing good, good, good, and you turn to three chapters and there's blood, there's corruption, there's lies.

[16 : 41] The question becomes God's creation was good, but will he sustain his good creation? Will God uphold the goodness of his creation or not?

Will he uphold his goodness in the midst of sin? But another key theme in creation and in the book of Genesis, another repeated word in the creation account is, anyone have any ideas what the other word is?

Blessing. There's the idea of blessing, also permeating the book of Genesis. When God created man, what did he do? He blessed him.

And what did, what happened when the seventh day came? God blessed it, the day of rest. And I think we can become so, I can become so callous to the idea of blessing because you think of blessing, you know, your meal, you bless this, you bless this, you bless this.

You can use some of the weight of the biblical idea of blessing. But when God blesses something, it means that that blessing will work itself out effectively in the life of that thing. It means something for God to bless someone or something.

[17 : 52] You see, God blesses Adam and he blesses Noah and he blesses Abraham. And his blessing is tied with the idea of being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth and expanding to the corners of the globe.

And it's interesting that God also blesses the seventh day of creation, the day of rest, the Sabbath day. And it starts this idea that you'll see all throughout the Bible, this eschatology that God's rest will permeate the whole earth until the new heavens and the new earth and we enter, as Hebrews would say it, you know, the eternal rest of God.

And what do we see? We see God working goodness back into creation. He's massaging goodness back into the created order by blessing things and by blessing people and by blessing the seventh day.

And we see God working goodness back into his fallen creation. And Genesis 50, the verse that we probably all know, Joseph says to his brothers, the very end of the book.

What does he say? You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. Do you see how Genesis is now bookended with good and good?

[19 : 16] And it's the idea of God not relenting on the earth, not relenting on man. And that verse is more than just a defense for the sovereignty of God or something like that.

And God is working goodness still, even after all that's happened. The idea of goodness reemerges and goodness bookends the story of Genesis.

And I just wondered, I wondered this when I was in seminary, of why does Genesis spend so much time on the character of Joseph? I mean, we spend like 12, 13 chapters on someone who's actually not directly in the line of the Messiah, why are we spending so much time on Joseph?

And I think it's because in the book of Genesis, Joseph is supposed to be a small taste of what Adam was intended to be. Adam just think about it. Adam fell to temptation and he eats the fruit. What does Joseph do? Joseph withstands temptation and he flees. Adam was supposed to cultivate and expand the garden. What does Joseph do? Joseph cultivates the kingdom of Egypt and he cultivates the land and he protects the people when the famine hits.

[20 : 35] Adam was supposed to protect his wife. He was supposed to look after her and care for her and protect her. What does Joseph do? Joseph protects his brothers. He protects his family. He protects foreigners.

But as you all know, Joseph dies. And the book of Genesis ends with Joseph in a coffin in Egypt. And he might have been a taste of what Adam should have been, but he was just a small taste of a better Adam and a better Joseph who would bring in a better new creation.

He would bring in a new creation. But the point is, the point of all this is, is what God created as good, God is recreating and upholding and sustaining and preserving despite sin entering the world.

And how does he do that? He does that through blessing his people and entering into covenant with them and working good, massaging good, even through evil. So if, I mean, if we think forward to Jesus, which we always have to do at the end of Luke, right before Jesus goes up into heaven, what does he do?

He reaches out his hands and he blesses his disciples, which we can so easily read over. But if you think again back to Genesis, the idea of blessing, the idea of creation, what is he doing?

[21 : 49] He's blessing them. He's working goodness despite sin. We're returning to the goodness of the garden, but even better.

And he's working goodness back into the timeline of redemption. So why does this matter for you? I said this would be practical. That wasn't very practical. Why does this matter for you?

Because Paul says, and you think about this in Ephesians one, that we are blessed with every blessing in Christ, blessed with every blessing. It's like a compound blessed with blessing.

Blessing on top of blessing on top of blessing is ours, which means that God has covenanted with us, his people to effectively bring about good in our lives.

Just think of Romans eight, all things work together for good. God isn't done working goodness, which is that idea of sustaining and preserving his people and his creation and bringing us to a better garden.

[22 : 45] So God upholds us, sustains us, preserves us and works for our good. And this reality all flows out of a doctrine of creation and recreation.

Okay, last point. I've hinted at multiple times the idea that the doctrine of creation is a matter of worship.

And we've seen that just in small little ways. But what does that mean? That the doctrine of creation is a matter of worship. Hebrews 11 three, you don't have to turn there, but Hebrews 11 three says, by faith, we understand that the universe was created by the word of God.

I always love when the Bible just tells you how something works. It just says, this is how you understand something. And it says, by faith, we understand that the universe was created by the word of God.

And I think a lot of us practically would probably replace that we'd take out the word faith and we'd put in the word reason. By reason, we can understand it or we could put in by science, we can understand it.

[23 : 52] And I don't mean to speak poorly of those things, but the Bible says it's primarily by faith. That doesn't mean those other things aren't helpful, but it's primarily by faith.

This means that we can use all the scientific proof we want to try to convince people of Christianity. I can, I could bring a whole skeleton of a dinosaur into you. I don't know what good that would do, but it could be here, you know, but believing that God created the world is a matter of your heart. It's a matter of faith. And Paul, in a cool way, explains what that means. He kind of takes, he takes that idea of worship and says, here's how this works.

This will be the last passage I ask you to turn to Romans one. And then we'll be done. Romans one. Paul explains how this all works.

Paul says in Romans one in verse 19, he says, for what can be known about God is playing to them, playing to people because God has shown it to them.

[25 : 06] For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power in divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse. You notice that clearly perceived. You can see them. You just, we can see the glory of God and creation.

You can see it as you walk home this evening. We all see the sunsets. We see the clouds. We see the rain. We see the stars. Psalm 19 tells us they're shouting the glory of God to us.

And the question is, what do we do as they shouted us? What do they do as the mountains proclaim the glory of God? God's creation declares his invisible attributes.

That's a crazy way of thinking about it. Calvin says it's something like, I don't have the direct quote in front of me, but he says something like God's creation was him putting on outside clothes that we could see what he's like.

[26 : 06] As you look around, you get a taste of the attributes of God. So the question is, what do we do with that knowledge? What do we do as the mountains declare the glory of God to us?

And Paul says, we all, everyone in this room, we do two things. There are two verbs to describe what we do with the glory of God. Does anyone know what those two verbs are?

The right in this passage. The two main verbs, he says, this is what you do with the creation of God as it proclaims itself to you.

The first one is in verse 18. The first thing we do with it is we suppress it. So we're suppressors by a very nature. And what does it mean to suppress something?

Dispress is the idea of holding down, of burying out of sight, obliterating from memory, pushing deep down. It's the idea if you've been in a pool and you have like a beach ball and you just try to push it under the water with all your might, but it pops up and you lay on it and it pops out the other way.

[27 : 16] That's what we do with the glory of God that proclaims itself. We try to push it down naturally because what is it, what is it, what is the glory of God tell you?

What does creation tell you? It tells you that God is the creator of all of this and it tells you what he's like and it tells you that you are a creature.

And that means he created you and that means that he can tell you what to do. And like that should give us all shivers, that last line. None of us likes the idea of someone telling us what to do. What does our culture say?

Who am I to tell you what to do? Who am I to tell you who you are? Who am I to tell you how to live your life? Guess what? God will tell you all of those things. He tells you who you are. He tells you how to live. He tells you what to do.

And he has the right to do that because we are his creatures. We're his creatures. And so people shove that down inside because they don't like that idea.

[28 : 11] One theologian even compares this suppression to what, and probably we're expecting to hear this name in church tonight, what Freud described as repression, the unconscious blocking of emotions of impulses and memories from your mind, and Freud says that we do this.

He's just observing that we do this as humans. Why? For two reasons. We want to protect ourselves from guilt and pain. And God's ownership over a life introduces guilt into our life because it means we're accountable to somebody.

And this is what our hearts are masters at doing, which is why many people don't realize that they're even doing it. Our hearts, our suppressing hearts are sort of like hybrid cars.

They're so quiet at doing it that you don't even hear it coming. It is just naturally what it does to the glory of God. And you can barely even hear it working, but you suppress truth.

And then every once in a while, that car will squeak a little bit or that car, maybe you'll hear a sermon or you'll see a sunset and something in your heart will say, there's a creator.

[29 : 15] There's a God. And the suppressing factory in you will just break down just a little bit. And something in you will say, there's a God. And the question is, will you bow your knee and worship to him?

Or will you continue to push that beach ball down inside of you? And when we do, when we suppress, our lives become empty because our hearts are made to worship God and be filled with adoration for his power and his glory.

So we need to do something to deal with the emptiness. Just think of Augustine's quotes are hard or restless until they find their rest in you. So the second verb that Paul says we do, and this will be our conclusion.

The second thing we do with the creation of God, anyone know the second verb?

The second verb is in verse 25. It's the verb exchange. And it actually comes up twice. So we suppress and we exchange. We're suppressors and exchangers. We exchange God himself for lies.

[30 : 21] It's like you trade him in and you choose lies instead. You say, I would rather have lies than I would have the glory of God that takes ownership of me.

And it's so refreshing that the Bible just tells you straight up, they're lies. They will lie to you.

Something you do other than worship God is a lie.

And so we live our lives. I mean, how many of us for years, maybe years, maybe even tonight, we realize we're living our life on lies. We're building castles of lies that we build our lives upon.

And the thing about those lies is they will in some way look like God himself because our heart was designed to worship God. So those lies will attempt to mimic exactly what creation gives us, which is eternal power and divine glory.

So those lies will tell you this will make you powerful. This will give you control. This will help you control and keep yourself safe and give you power over people. And this will help you to be in some ways a God.

[31 : 28] This will help you live forever. This will make you immortal. And so we'll follow lies, all of our life, that will give us those things. We'll buy a new car because it makes us feel powerful.

We'll buy a bigger house because it makes us feel in a small way like a God. We want to move up the ladder at work because it gives us a little bit more control. We want to get that surgery or work out more because it makes us feel we'll be young forever.

And Paul tells us what we already know. Those are lies. That car won't grant us power. It's a lie.

That house won't make you a God. It's a lie. Exercising won't grant us immortality.

It's a lie. But our hearts don't stop trying to fill the void. And that's why Calvin calls to heart a never ending idle factory.

Our heart is just a factory that keeps producing new ways to fill the emptiness of our life. It never stops trying to fill life with meaning. And we all do this. We all in little ways exchange the glory of God for other things on a daily basis.

[32 : 31] But we need to remind ourselves that these things are lies and that they will promise us things that they can't deliver. So in conclusion, if we're looking at the doctrine of creation, it protects us from lies.

It protects us from emptiness. It protects us from living our whole life chasing after meaningless things because it just simply says worship God for his glory and his beauty around you.

And that will help you as it helped Job to make meaning a pain. It'll produce goodness in your life and it means that you'll be going toward a new garden.

And the only way to find meaning in the midst of pain in daily life is back to the very beginning to join with the elders of Revelation for the chorus of heaven.

And to say with the church of all ages, worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created.

[33 : 30] And that's just an introduction to the doctrine of creation.