

God Spoke and It was Good

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[0 : 00] 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 earth, 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. 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. God called the dry land earth and the waters that were gathered together, he called seas.

[1 : 05] And God saw that it was good. And God said, let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seeds, 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 seed, 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 them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.

And it was so. And God made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, and the stars. And God said them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and 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.

[2 : 22] So God created the great sea creatures, and every living creature that moves, with which the water swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them saying, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth. 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. The Word of the Word. Last week we started a new series on Genesis 1 and 2, seven weeks looking at the story of creation and all that it means.

And we really focused last week just on verse 1 and half of 2. In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth. That is the most published sentence in world history, the most known sentence, I think, in all of world history.

[3 : 34] God created the heavens and the earth. And it answers the question we focused on this last week. Why is there something rather than nothing?

One of the perennial questions of human existence, of all of philosophy, that is very difficult to answer unless you believe in God. Why is there something rather than nothing? And the answer we saw, the Christian claim, is that the reason there is something rather than nothing is because there is a God and God created the world.

And that means that we are unnecessary creatures. We are relative. We don't need to exist. That God both existed, created because He has absolute power, but that creation was no accident, it was purposed.

And that means that this entire world is gratuitous. It's a gift. Everything we have is a gift. And the only really bright response to that is the response of gratitude on our part to the Creator who's made everything.

Now, one of the phrases that's really common, I didn't mention last week, that the Christian thinkers of 2,000 years will often use all the way back to the time the Old Testament was written to describe the God of Genesis 1.

[4 : 53] You open page one of the Bible, one of the questions you got to ask is, who is this God? It's page one. Who is this God I'm reading about here? And one of the things we read very quickly, we learn very early, is this phrase that God is both transcendent and imminent.

And transcendent means that God is so above everything. He's outside of space and time. He's the only God that has the power to actually make space and time. Transcendent.

And at the same time, He's imminent, and that's an older word that just means so very close, so very intimate with us. He's transcendent, absolute, and yet so very near, imminent, at the very same time, so very close.

That's the God we read about in Genesis 1. And so let's expand that a bit today and move from verse 1 to verse 25. So we took a half hour last week on verse 1, and if you multiply that out by 25, you could look at these 25 verses that Noah read for us for hours and hours and hours.

We've got to focus down, and here's the way that we can do that. There's a repeated refrain. There are several in this chapter, but one of them is in verse 4, and it says, And God saw the light, the light that He had made, and He saw that it was good.

[6 : 20] And then in verse 12, 10, God saw and it was good. In verse 12, in verse 18, in verse 21, in verse 25, in verse 31, God saw and it was good.

Very good at the end. Seven times it's mentioned. And so let's look at this whole creation story and ask, Let me show you three ways, three ways that God made a good world.

Three aspects, we might say, of what it means to say that this world is good, the way that God made it. Let's focus on that for just a few minutes. So first, in verse 4, He had made light.

He had separated day and night, light and darkness, and then He looked at that. It says, He saw, and He said that is good. What does that mean?

What does it mean? First aspect of goodness, God's goodness. In the same way that maybe you make something, you might make a cake and you step back and you say, That is, that was, I did well.

[7 : 25] That was good. It tastes good. It looks good, all of it. There's a sense of what God's doing here that's the exact same, except at an absolute level. You can create a, you can make a cake, you cannot create light.

God did, and He stepped back like an artist steps back from a painting and takes delight in what He made. So He steps back and He looks at it and He says, Wow, that is good.

It's exactly the way it should be. So here we've got the Lord of the Universe who made everything, stepping back and looking at creation seven times throughout this passage like an artist looks at a great painting.

And says, I'm pleased with that. That is very good. It's beautiful. In other words, we've got God pronouncing that the world He made is beautiful. It's the creation, it's not only the pronouncement of beauty.

Boy, you know, this is the creation of the reality of beauty. The very fact that beauty exists is in this pronouncement, that what He made is good, that it is beautiful.

[8 : 33] So one of the ways to see this is people, if you've come across this probably, if you've been around the Bible much throughout your life, people will ask, is Genesis 1 poetry or is it history?

And the right answer to that, when you look at it carefully, I think is yes. It is highly structured. It's extremely structured. It's got poetic elements. So He saw and it was good seven times. It says that it was morning and evening. We go through that seven times. And He spoke and He spoke and He spoke. There are real poetic literary elements through the movement of these six days.

And at the same time, when you read it, it also comes out clearly as a statement about history. It's not being offered here as anything less than history, but it's highly structured history. One of the ways to think about it is in the book of Exodus, where God brings Israel across the Red Sea, and then there's a story, the history of that.

And then in Exodus 15, Moses sings about what happened. He sings the song of crossing the Red Sea. And when you see the lyrics of the song, it recounts the history in full, but it's a song.

[9 : 48] And that's exactly Genesis 1. It's a symphony and it's history simultaneously. It's sung. And you can see in that the very simple point that even in the way God gave us this passage, it was written by an artist.

It's got artistry all through it. Let me give you a couple more details on that quickly. The text behind this English text is Hebrew originally.

And in the first sentence, there are seven words. And in the second sentence, the Hebrew sentence here in Genesis 1, there are 14 words. And the multiples of seven all throughout go on and on and on.

Way too long for us to recount right now. We don't have time, but I'll give you just a couple more.

Seven times the word good is mentioned. Seven times there's morning and evening.

The whole entire structure is in multiples of seven. The earth is mentioned. The land is mentioned 21 times. And that's a multiple of seven. Seven times three.

[10 : 51] And even the entire word count from Genesis 1, 1 to 2, 3, which is one introductory section, is a multiple of seven. I think if I remember right, it's 469.

Hopefully that's a multiple of seven, but I do know it is a multiple of seven. Whatever the word count is. The word that comes up most, the noun in Genesis 1, 1 to 2, 3, is the word God.

God's name, 35 times a multiple of seven that shows up. The entire thing is a literary masterpiece.

And we could go on and on and on. And the whole thing is framed in a six day structure.

God created in the space of six days. And the headline article of that is in verse two, where it says in the beginning, the world was formless and void. Formless and void.

So formless, it was there, but it didn't have the fullness of shape. It didn't have land. It didn't have the sky. It didn't have all the things we know about planet earth and the universe.

[11 : 51] And then it was void. It was empty. So it wasn't filled with life. It didn't have us and vegetation and plants and creepy things and all sorts of stuff. It didn't have it. It was without structure and it was empty at the very beginning.

He made it. There was matter, but it was without structure and empty. And then if you look, you can see in day one, he creates day and night, light and darkness. And in day two, he creates the water and the sky, the seas, the sky.

On day three, he creates the dry land. Now, if you look really closely, what you see is there's a really obvious pattern. In the beginning, it was formless without structure and unfilled, empty.

Days one to three, God gives it structure. Days four to six, he fills it up with stuff. So let me just show this to you. And day one, he creates light and darkness.

But on day four, he creates the sun, moon and stars that give the light. He created the structure and then he filled it day one, day four. And that means day two and five and day three and six correspond.

[12 : 58] And in day two, what did he do? He created the water, the sea and the sky. And in day five, what did he create? The sea creatures and the birds. Day three, what did he do? He raised up the dry land.

Day six, what did he put? Animals and humans on the dry land. You see, he formed it day one to three. He filled it day four to six. It's got this artistic structure about it throughout the space of six days.

And you could ask, you know, a question like, what did God make? And we could go through this list. I did this once in class at the seminary and we listed over 70 things, potential things here that are listed that God made.

But we don't even think about the obvious, you know. We think about plants and humans and the world and the sky and birds and the universe and stars and all sorts of things. But what about space and time and number and concepts and consciousness and reason and emotions and self-awareness and names and personalities and love and family bonds and friendship and work and music and vocal chords that can speak languages and imagination and the possibility of new life, not just the beginning that he made, but production, multiplication, and babies and fun and joy and peace and kindness and parties and development and art and painting and cultivation and sculpting and building things.

And we could go on forever. All of it creature, all of it made by God, the great artist. Calvin said that the natural world that God made is the theater of God's glory.

[14:36] It's beautiful and it is the theater of the display of his glory in this world. The multiplicity of ecosystems, the multiplicity of things that exist and do not have to.

God didn't just make a plant, he made plants that we still haven't discovered yet. Flora and Fauna that I don't know how to name. I don't know if you've ever been to Costco here in Edinburgh. It's pretty great. I say that as an American, I know. When you go into Costco, the first thing that you see in Costco is the myriad of unbelievable televisions that are on offer at the moment. And you have to be pulled away from this. But OLED TV, I don't know if you know much about OLED TV, it stands for Organic Light Emitting Diode Television, which is the current kind of top tier TVs you can buy.

The human eye, God created color. Human eye can see 7 to 10 million colors on average, a good working human eye. The OLED TV emits over 1 billion different colors.

[15:53] You can't even see them all. God made a world where there's color and it didn't have to be that way. But not just six or seven, there are billions of colors and you can't even see them all.

And the beauty is beyond imagination. We don't have just one senses, we have five senses. We don't just have food. We have food that tastes good. And we have food that comes to us in such multiplicity and variety of taste profiles that it's unimaginable.

The goodness of beauty, the maker of beauty. Let me move on with this and this is our longest point by far. But if you believe today that the world came about by mere chance, this world is a mere product of natural selection, I just want to ask what do you do with the gratuitous joy in this life?

The gratuitous beauty. Does it make any sense in a world that came about by chance by mere natural selection? If the world is by chance and merely natural selection, then that means that what you should be and who you are is a person who exists to survive.

And what good does the gratuitous amount of beauty in this world do for a person that's just trying to survive? I'll tell you what it does to you, it leaves you very distracted. You know, you're out there trying to survive survival of the fittest in a world of mere natural chance, natural selection through chance.

[17:23] And the beauty, the joy, the parties, the great good things, this is what's getting in the way. It's distracting you. You know, how can you make sense of life without God if you go to the museum and cry?

If you go find yourself weeping at the end of a great film. You see, without belief in God, you don't have any reason to suggest that there is real meaning in life or beauty.

Beauty is not just a concept. Beauty is not just an idea. Beauty exists. It's real. And I don't know if you've been to any modern museums of art. I feel like it's probably safe to say that overwhelmingly 99% of us, at least in this world, who go to a modern museum of art, find ourselves at least at time looking around thinking, how did this make it into an art museum?

And the reason you say that, the reason we all say that and you should, is because 20th and 21st century art follows a culture that no longer believes in the objectivity of beauty. You can't.

If you deny the existence of God, beauty is nothing but what? Your opinion. And so modern museums are trying to reflect the chaos of a life apart from God. They're doing a good job quite often.

[18:36] Now beauty is real. God made it. And it's the creator of heaven and earth that makes it possible. I got to move on. This world has a lot of nasty in it.

A lot of evil, a lot of ugliness. But let me just say that the ugliness in this world is parasitic on the concept of the beautiful. You know, you can't have ugly without beauty, but you can have beauty without ugly.

Beauty is the beginning. Ugly is the parasite that has turned this world upside down. We'll come back to that in a minute. Secondly, and briefly, verse 10, verse 12, verse 18, verse 21, verse 25, verse 31.

Seven different times God looks out at what he made and saw that it was good. And this is just beyond the reading we gave, but verse 31 says it was very good.

Another way that people have taken this concept of God seeing the world he made and then saying it's good is it's this public recognition in the beginning that not only is it beautiful, is it a delight, but it also works.

[19 : 44] It's harmonious. There's a utility about this world that God made. It really works. There's an order to it. It's functional. There's things that you can wake up every day and expect about this world.

And it's because of the way God made it. And so in verse 5, 8, and 13, just examples of the many moments where it says there was evening and there was morning. There's this consistency from the beginning of day and night, of days, of darkness and light coming.

In verse 22, there's this pronouncement of be fruitful and multiply to all the creatures, meaning there's the possibility from the beginning of production, of multiplication. Of more things coming into this world, the miracle of life that happens over and over again right here from the beginning.

Verse 25, there are kinds, each according to its kind. There's a reason why we as humans can still and continuously recognize a tree as a tree, a dog as a dog, a cat as a cat, a human as a human. And it's because from the beginning God created things as they are according to their kinds. This is dangerous for me, I just thought, this is not my notes, this is when I get, it gets dangerous for me to say this because I could go off on a tangent here.

[21 : 01] But let me just mention, if you go outside in Edinburgh today and just try to find two trees that are identical, and you won't be able to do it yet, the tiniest little child in our city knows that's a tree and that's a tree and that's a tree and that's a tree, but none of them are the same.

God made us as human beings to understand that this world has kinds, unity and diversity, different things yet all unified together on the same concepts, the kinds that are mentioned here.

Now, all of this together comes together to say that not only does God's creation, does creation make sense of the beauty, the gratuitous joy in our world, but it also makes science possible.

This creation account gives a better justification for why science is actually possible in the modern world. What do we have here? We have order, utility, and the possibility of science through the lens of verification, the possibility of verification.

What do you need to be able to verify something in a scientific experiment? You need repeatability and expectation that the same thing will happen the next time.

[22 : 14] One of our friends out here on the royal mile, David Hume, he usually has the colon on top of his head if you go out here to the mile, great statue. He's one of the great philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment.

He brought this into question, so one writer puts it like this, for verification you need repeatability. The sun rose yesterday, the sun rose all the days before that, and so we say the sun shall rise tomorrow.

But David Hume came along and said, you don't know that. How can you say that? You predict it, you have lots of good reasons to suggest that the sun will rise tomorrow, but you can't possibly say that you actually know it will, right?

And so one writer puts it like this, the assumption is that this world exists under law-like regularity. That there is an order, an order that exists beyond the present order, and the God who makes days, morning and evening, light, sun, the kinds continues to give these gifts to us over and over again. And so the physicist Paul Davies, he put it like this, this is the professor of mathematical physics at the University of Adelaide. Even the most atheistic scientist accepts as an act of faith that the universe is not absurd.

[23 : 32] There's a rational basis to the physical existence manifested as a law-like order in nature, and so that's what makes it comprehensible to us. Science can proceed, he writes, only if the scientist adopts an essentially theological worldview, that there is a God-given law-like regularity from the beginning.

That's what makes science possible. Einstein was not a Christian, but toward the end of his life he said that the more he studied the sciences, the more he believed in God.

He just was unwilling to say which God that was that he was believing in. But here in Edinburgh, the city of Edinburgh, many of you will be aware of James Clerk Maxwell, who was announced in the 21st century as the third-greatest physicist of all of history after Newton, who was a Christian, and Einstein, who was a deist, who believed in God as well.

James Clerk Maxwell was born in Newtown, studied at the University of Edinburgh, and he wrote this later in his life. He said, you may fly to the end of the world in a search for the truth, for the science, the truth from science.

He says, you will find no answer but the God of Scripture. Science versus religion, it's a superficial debate, and instead what we can see, according to creation, is that the more that we grow in our knowledge of the sciences, ultimately the New Testament says, is growth in the knowledge of God himself.

[25 : 02] The knowledge of Jesus, in fact, of Colossians 2-3, in the Son of God are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The more we get to know the world that God made, the more we actually know about Him, about the Son of God himself.

And so let me move to our close, but I want to say this. You might come today and say, where is God, this God of creation?

I want in my life God to just show up. If God were to come to me like He came to Moses in a burning bush, if He were to come to me like Jesus came to so many people through miraculous deeds, then I could say, irrefutable proof, God is near, God is present, God is in my life.

And in the coming days we're going to address that more and more, and I can't do that fully right now, but let me just say this. Acts 17, God is not far from every one of you. In Him you live and you move and you have your being.

The very fact of your existence, Genesis 1, Acts 17 says, means that God is near you. God is close to you. And we open with the words of Jeremiah, seek Him and you will find Him.

[26 : 20] Seek Him with an open heart, look for the Lord, the God of creation, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart. And so that leads lastly. God says seven times He made the world, He saw it, and it was very good.

And the most consistent way finally of reading this historically has typically been to say, not only does God see his artistic work and delight in it like the artist, not only does God look out at the ordered world that works, the functionality, its utility, and take delight in it and say, that is good. But also the most consistent way that the theologians have read this throughout the centuries is to say, when he sees it as good, he's declaring that it has moral goodness, that it's full of value, that this is a world where should really does exist, where moral values are real.

Just as much as there's law like regularity to the sciences, the natural laws, so there is law like regularity to the moral order that God made from the very beginning of history.

Psalms 34.8, O taste and see that the Lord is good. Let me bring this home. Science, the possibility of science, ordered universe, the possibility of gratuitous joy in this life, the beauty that we all experience, the God who is beauty in himself that made this world.

[27 : 46] Science even needs to be able to confess that the world is full of objective moral value. So we all naturally, we know the connection might not be as immediately intuitive, but we know that science has its limits.

Let me give you one example. During the Holocaust, Joseph Mengele was Adolf Hitler's chief physician at Auschwitz, and Mengele experimented on Jews and Roma peoples.

He did things that were so horrific in his experimentation that I won't dare to mention them from the pulpit here. And let me just ask, how can we look out at the practices of science and say, no, there's a limit?

There's a limit. You see, God brings the possibility of science, but how is it that we all by natural instinct look out and say, there's got to be a limit to what we can do?

There are shoulds and cants and must nots in this world that we all recognize. And that's because God from the very beginning looked out and said, no, it is good.

[29 : 02] There's a moral order that reflects the very character of his existence. God is so absolute that he creates beauty. God is so absolute that he can create the order that we call mathematics and number.

God is so absolute that he gives us his moral character into the heart of this world, and it is good. There is a should to this life.

You may come today this morning, you may come this morning and think, but my life is unraveling a bit right now by so much that is not good.

You know, this threefold pronouncement of goodness at the beginning. But my life is full of things that are not good, full of pains. Is your family unraveling?

Is your life destroyed by sinful habits that you cannot shake? Is your workplace destroyed by such difficult abrasive relationships where there is no kindness, peace or joy underneath?

[30 : 07] You might come today and say, this threefold goodness of creation yet life doesn't feel that way at all. And in Luke chapter 18 verse 19, Jesus was called by the crowd, good.

This word that's used here in Genesis 1, and he said to the crowd, you call me good, but let me say that no one is good except God alone. And he was doing something very subtle when he said that. He said, don't you know no one is good except the one who made the good and pronounced it from Genesis chapter one.

And Jesus was trying to subtly allow them to see that he is that very God who made the world good, who is, he is absolute beauty in himself.

And when you come to the Gospels, you realize in the mystery of the incarnation that the absolute beautiful one who made everything gratuitous joy he's given us, he became a baby.

He was wrapped in clothes. He had to go to his mother's breast. He, the God who is absolutely independent became totally dependent.

[31 : 23] And in the mystery of the cross, Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came to rescue us from all that is ugly, all that is broken, all that is unraveling our lives, including our own hearts.

He was decreated. He underwent chaos. He, the cross, the ugliest moment in human history. Isaiah 53 says at the cross, he went like a sheep to the slaughter. And from that moment, we had to turn our faces away.

It was hideous. It was ugly. It was everything that should never be. It was utter chaos. It was the opposite of creation. It was truly decreation. And when he rose from the dead, the mystery of the resurrection, that was the moment God pronounced. He is going to take everything that makes this world ugly, broken, and sinful, and turn it and make it new again.

Jesus Christ in the act of resurrection said, I am making all things new. First John 2.8, the darkness is passing away. The true light is already shining in this life. Jesus allowed himself to be decreated at the cross so that you today could be recreated in him.

So that you would have the hope, the possibility of a world once again that is truly good. And I just want to invite you to see that every single moment in your life where you experience just bits of gratuitous joy.

[32 : 51] If you buy an OLED TV and you know that there were one billion colors coming out of that thing that you can't even see, will you see that he's continuing to give you hints and shadows that he is making all things good again?

That the darkness really is passing away. The shadows will be one day no more. That resurrection is the first fruit of the goodness that is to come into this world. God has come to recreate creation in Jesus Christ.

And if you will turn, friends, if you will turn to Jesus Christ today, he will make you new. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for this gospel.

And we pray that in the midst of a world that is so ugly at times and so broken, that is not good. That is evil. We would remember that the only possibility for us to even say that is if evil, the ugliest parasitic on the good and the beautiful.

And so in the light of that, give us fresh belief in the living God today. Bring somebody here, oh Lord, to faith in Christ to see for the first time the beauty of the Lord who has come for them.

[34 : 04] To make them new, to rescue them, to bring them up out of the depths. We pray, Father, that you would take the doctrine of recreation through Jesus and apply it to each of our lives in a way that we might not have expected when we came here today.

And so we ask for that now in Jesus' name. Amen.