

1 The Dance of Creation **Genesis 1: 1-31; 2: 1-3**

Introduction to Series

For this year, the whole year we as a church community are going to use the *New City Catechism* as the basis of our instruction from the pulpit, Sunday School, Community Groups, Children and Youth. Here is why? To *make disciples who embody Christ in the everyday by loving God, loving people and loving life* we have to have instruction in truth, we have to know the truth because as Jesus says, “*truth sets us free.*”

The way this will work from the pulpit in our weekly teaching is we will not do a one to one on the question but have chosen different passages or books of the Bible to give more shade and color to the meaning of the questions. So, for instance the first questions deal with God and creation, so we are spending the first seven weeks on creation as revealed in Genesis 1-4. When we talk about the law we will go through the book of Galatians. Make sense.

So, we are doing this together as a community for a few reasons. 1. We live in a time where there are conflicting accounts of our origin, what our purpose is, if there even is a sexual binary, what is good. These are the big questions of life, we need to be clear on what we believe, because how you answer these questions determine your life. **Ideas do have consequences.** 2. Most of what we will talk about the next few weeks is a minority report in popular culture and how do you hold fast to this faith? Well, I will tell you one thing, if you are alone it will be hard. If you have watched the Mandalorian, you know he is the last of his sect. His creed looks weird to everyone. It seems outlandish and we see as the show progresses, it is almost impossible to keep to certain tenets of his creed without a community. A cord of three strains is not easily broken Ecclesiastes. So, as we study this as a community this is where we stand, these are the stories that shape our identity. You ready, we are starting at the beginning, or before beginning of time.

2 Genesis 1: 1-31; 2: 1-3

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 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. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. 6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse^[a] in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7 And God made^[b] the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8 And God called the expanse Heaven.^[c] And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. 9 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. 10 God called the dry land Earth,^[d] and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants^[e] yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. 12 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. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. 14 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,^[f] and for days and years,¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. 16 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. 17 And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light

from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds^[a] fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." ²¹ 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. ²² And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man^[b] 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."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ 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." ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ 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 the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ 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.

² Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² 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. ³ 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.

Introduction

In a small group I taught some years ago we decided to study God in a sort of different way and that was to study it in terms of comparative religion in relationship to what other faiths, religions and philosophies have said about **creation, man and why we are here**. Different people would read on different religions on **creation for instance**: Greco Roman view, Hindu view, Buddhist and of course the secular view. The reason I did that was when we deal with origins we deal with mystery and also questions science can't answer because we can't put these questions to the scientific method and get any answers. *We are dealing with issues of faith*. Science seeks to answer the how question, how things work, we enter the realm of faith, religion and philosophy when we seek to answer the why questions. What I wanted to demonstrate was, in the realm of origins and purpose, was that if Christianity was not true compared to another worldview, you would wish it were true.

Now when we approach Genesis 1-3 we have to ask: What was the purpose of this text when Moses gave this to God's people thousands of years ago, primitive people who couldn't read or write for the most part, simple people. Yet also what would be appropriate revelation to relate to modern people who live in the scientific age after the invention of microscopes, computers and the Internet. *And what we have is not so much a scientific explanation of how God created the universe but why he created it and what is its purpose.* Not the method but the meaning. So what is God saying to us about who God is, who we are and

how we are related to this world he created. Let me show you 4 things and hopefully you will see what I mean when I say *this is the most hopeful and meaningful picture of creation in relationship to other worldviews*. Creation is *Ex Nihilo*; Creation is For God's on Glory; Creation is Ordered and Formed; Creation is Good and Enjoyed by God

3 Creation is *Ex Nihilo*,

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

The first thing we see is the picture of a *God who existed before creation and that matter or the world of stuff is out of nothing*. The reason that is significant is every other creation myth I have seen there is always something there. The world *create* here is only and always used of God; it means *literally out of nothing*. When we create it is always with something, preexisting raw material. Therefore, this word is never used of people in the creative process. **Teri creates or makes beautiful things in our shop, but it is out of something. She doesn't create the wood; she shapes the wood to her imagination. I create beautiful things on my grill, but I work with raw material already there.** As Dorothy Sayers says, we are sub-creators.

God created or began, it didn't happen by chance or a random selection of things that happened. He spoke. Also, if you read most other accounts of creation it is always in the class of titan type god's, it is an accident from the fight and typically the world in those accounts is not something looked on with favor.

See this account stands against polytheism. Polytheism means many God's. This account says there is not a pantheon of God warring in heavens, but one supreme God who out of nothing creates. This creation story actually the first religion that says there is one God.

4 Creation is for God's own glory

²⁶ *Then God said, "Let us make man^[b] 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."*

²⁷ *So God created man in his own image,*

in the image of God he created him;

male and female he created them. (Genesis 1: 26-27)

Notice in **verse 26** its says *let us make man in our image*. In other worlds unlike **humanism or at least atheistic humanism**, this account says *man is not the measure of all things, God is*. God made the world to display his glory, to reflect his majesty. We really see this in the Psalms, where nature sings of his glory, pours forth speech. **Nature is reflecting God's glory. 5**

*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above^[a] proclaims his handiwork.*

² *Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.*

³ *There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.*

⁴ *Their voice^[b] goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world. (Psalm 19: 1-4)*

Psalms says the trees sing of his glory, the mountains clap their hands, Isaiah says the whole world is full of his glory. God as a creator, an artist, puts his stamp on the world, it dances in tune to his will. It is beautiful, it is wonderful, and we are held in rapture by the world. As Greek Orthodox Theologian says, **6** *The world was created as the "matter;" the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament. (Alexander Schmemmann, (For the Life of the World)*

See, we have a place in it, an exalted place in it, but we are not the measure of it. Oh, and it is wonderful. We want to pass into the beauty, we want to be part of it at times but as beautiful as it is, it is not God, God is not nature like pantheism or eastern religion says, creation is finite. And for God's glory.

7 Creation is ordered and has form

What I mean by that, it has design. Notice we have 7 days of creation; you know the story. The story reads like God as an artist. Genesis is a poem or at least has poetic qualities, a lot of repetitions, a lot of repetitions. Now, On the first three days God *forms*, again the suggestion from this semi poetic account is of an artist. In the first three days is a world with light and darkness, sea and sky and a fertile earth. See the forms. The suggestion that God is like an artist comes in verse 2, listen, **8** ² *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.* (Genesis 1:2)

This hovering is suggestive of an artist pondering the design. Or like a gardener when he takes the raw material of dirt and in his mind and imagination begins to lay out what the finished product will look like that is the gist here Then the next three days God fills, or populates it with moon and stars, ocean and dry land and fills the ocean with living fish, the sky with birds and then with animals and man in his own image.

The implications of this are staggering. Because there is a creator designing and creating with intent, we can know purpose. God made the world with purpose and design, there is a form and freedom is when things run according to their design and purpose—we see something like deep beauty and satisfaction. And it suggest we can know the design and thus how to live freely in this world, or really this home God made for us

We are helped here because the secular account says there is no God, things happen by chance, we don't have an essence, or design and nature is mute we make it up as we go and if that is true how can we know things like love, justice, beauty, mercy—things that give life meaning. That is the point, if no designer we can't know these things. but if there is a designer, then there is a design and what Genesis and the rest of the bible is telling you is you can know your design—your telos. You are not the measure of all things, you have to bow to the givens. I love what Keller says and he is following on Marilyn Robinson's book of essays called, *The Givenness of Things*, **9** “...reality is not infinitely malleable. It imposes itself on us, and freedom comes only by living into that givenness. We were built to know, serve, and love God. If we try to live for anything else, it leads to slavery, but when we begin to live for God and follow his will, we find that we are actually becoming who we were meant to be, realizing our original design.” (Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God*)

See things only work if there are in their design. If I put water in my lawn mower it breaks down. If I put allium foil in my microwave it will blow up. See as things work in their design they thrive, but if not, they break down. See, Genesis says there is a designer who tells you your design, and how to find thriving and fulfillment. Humans are like this you see. God made us to work a certain way and history is the sad story of people trying to make up their own design—and when that happens—breakdown—sin, alienation, war, strife. All sin is when we move out of our design. Creation is ordered and has form. There is purpose to it. And we can know it.

10 Creation is good and delighted in by God

This is perhaps the thing most of us miss when looking at this passage. But look at it. Our first hint in the creation narrative is that this is not a business report of the weeks work, cold, dry and efficient is in verse 2. God *hovered* over his creation. This word is used of an eagle or hen hovering over her birds, it is the picture of mother birth lovingly looking at her little eaglets or chickens. God is engaged, lovingly over the works of his hands

And then 8 times when God creates it is good. Then one time it is very good. Now what does that mean? Is this like when I check my children's homework and check off on it, that's good, or when the city inspector comes behind the different contractors and signs off on his work, kind of like it passes inspection?

No, this is the language of delight. This is more like this; when Jamie and I are cooking or John and we have marinated something, spent hours over a grill and then we put a knife to it and take a sample and if everything has worked according to plans what do we say. "That is good, it will fulfill our need for the intake of calories of those we will feed." Kind of in a bland way, well this is our duty and we have done it. No, when we say that is good, it is something that comes from deep within the soul of the artist. It is the language of longing fulfilled—the language of pure delight. This comes from deep within the soul—this is the language of satisfaction of deep joy. This word is not used of an inspection; it is used after a great meal, or some great play or after times of deep intimacy with your spouse! It is when you are overwhelmed in the depths of your soul and can't believe how good something could be.

No religion has such a positive view of creation. Eastern mysticism says matter is an illusion—you try to escape it. The Greeks though the body was the prison house of the soul and you needed to escape it, even many Christians have supposed that and says heaven is God taking us out of this world, but we read in Revelation the exact opposite. *Heaven is God coming down to live with us in a renewed world.* Christianity says pleasure was made by God and is good, not something to run from or to worship, but to enjoy. See, we were made for God and to see God reflected in this world. Earth is the home God made for us. **11** *"There is no good trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it."* (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

Conclusion

I mean that is almost too good to be true, so how come we are so at odds with it? If you look at this passage, the whole of it, it suggests creation is like a great dance and is dancing before the creator and here is our problem, we want to enter that dance and we can't. **Sin has made it, so we don't know the music—and we are frustrated.** But centuries later in John one we read of something and the language is almost the same, **12** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of men.* (John 1: 1-4)

John is telling us Jesus the creator, with the father in creation, sees this broken world, sees we can't enter the dance of joy, we don't know the music, or the steps of the dance and he comes down and enters time and space. And Jesus the gospels tell us literally went to the cross—where the opposite of Genesis 1 happened to him. He was made void. He was deconstructed, so that by living the life we should have lived and then dying the death we deserved we could enter the dance again.

Nature screams God is there, but we can't enter, *but God does the unthinkable, the maker to scream his love for us—in the incarnation and death on the cross—screams in a way that nature can't—because I am unmade for you, you can be remade.* I love you and I invite you into the great dance that will go on not only in time but also for all eternity. That is Genesis. Ideas have consequences. And god tells us in the beginning who we are, what nature is about and how to love it without it destroying us. Let us pray