

Filling The Canvas

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Genesis 1:14-15
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So great to see all of you. For those who may not know me, my name is Kevin and I get to be one of the pastors here of Redeemer Bible Church. And as always, it is a great honor and privilege to open God's word together with all of you. So with that in mind, I want to go ahead now and invite and encourage you to open your bibles to the book of beginnings, the Book of Genesis, chapter 1. The Book of Genesis, chapter 1. And while you're turning there, I want to remind us of something we observed previously in our journey through Genesis. And that was a phrase from back in verse 2, without form and void. As I mentioned before in the original Hebrew, this phrase is comprised of two rhyming words, tohu and bohu, formless and empty. And if you recall, we said that when God initially created the heavens and the earth, he did so by creating it first, like a blank canvas, like an empty space that he had crafted for himself as the master architect and designer to begin his creative masterpiece.

You may recall from our last sermon in Genesis that I provided us with a table, and it was a table which demonstrates the parallel that is found within the creation week. And so in looking at this table once again, I want to remind us that there are two triads found within the first six days of creation. In other words, two sets of three days. And God's creative activity in each of those triads directly corresponds to the backdrop that has been provided for us back in verse 2. And so last time we were in Genesis, we looked at what God did on days one through three, which you see on the left-hand side of the table. In effect providing form to formlessness. Like the divine potter, God was shaping and molding the framework and the environment for his creation. And we talked about how that forming was a preparation for the divine stage upon which God would sovereignly exercise the great drama of his redemptive plan within time and space, of course all to the glory of his grace.

So today as we look to the right-hand side of the table, we see the heading fill. And what we're going to discover in a more detailed fashion is that with the second half of creation week, which is days four through six, after the fundamental construction of the cosmos was complete, God began to fill his newly formed creation. Question of course is what did he fill it with? Well, on day four, we will see him fill the heavens and the earth with the light he bestows to the sun, moon, and stars. On day five, we will see him fill the expanse and the seas with the living animals of birds, and fish. And on day six, we will see him fill the earth with the creatures of land, including the culminating work of his divine purpose in creation, the creating of his own image bearers, which are you and me.

So like a divine artist then with his canvas now perfectly formed, today, we will discover that God is prepared at this point in creation to implement the brilliance of his creativity. And in doing so, we will now through the pages of scripture, see our majestic Lord filling the canvas. Filling the canvas. So with that in mind, I want to ask those who are able now to stand with me for the reading of God's word from Genesis chapter 1. We'll begin reading in verse 14 and read through verse 25. And there God's word reads, "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 a light upon the earth.' And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars. And God set 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.' 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 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. 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."

With that, you may be seated as we pray and ask God to bless the reading and preaching of his word. Father, as we've been singing today, it is a privilege that you have blessed us with to be able to call you Father. For that is the relationship that you have blessed us with through your son Jesus Christ. And we pray now to you oh God as our father, and we ask that you will bless our time together. I pray, Lord, as we look at your word, which you have revealed to us, that it will be a lens by which we will come to better know who you are and to see you in all your glory and majesty and splendor. And that through the creativity and the power displayed in creation that we will come to more fully appreciate and be grateful for our salvation. All that you are doing in us as redeemed image bearers and all that you have called us to be.

As I preach your word today, I pray that you will empower and accompany your word being proclaimed, that you'll give each of us focus and attention upon what you'd have us to hear, and that in our hearing you will illuminate your truth that we might understand it, and that through our understanding that we would be transformed into disciples who love you more, who have a greater desire to come to know you and to spend intimate time with you. That we would be the people that you've called us to be more effectively and more consistently. I pray, Father, as we look at creation that this will not be for us a mere academic exercise, but that it will be a time of

worship. That we will give you the praise and the honor and the adoration that you so richly deserve. That you will be glorified and that Christ will be exalted. And we pray all of this in His name. Amen.

Well, unless you've been living under a rock for the past few weeks, you know that tomorrow there is a major event taking place in our country. It is an event that will not happen again in the United States until the year 2044. From Texas to Maine, approximately 32 million people will experience a total solar eclipse. That phenomenon which occurs when the moon is perfectly positioned between the sun and the earth. And so for approximately four minutes thereabout those in the direct path of the eclipse spanning 115-mile-wide path will experience the moon casting its shadow upon the earth as it blocks out the light from the sun. And yet when you begin to research this phenomenon, there is a repeated phrase that you will both see and hear being utilized by secular scientists. And that phrase is this. Cosmic coincidence. Cosmic coincidence. And so the question is why would evolutionary secular scientists even acknowledge or utilize that kind of language? Well, because they recognize the precise specificity that allows for a total solar eclipse to occur.

First of all, they recognize that the sun is actually 400 times larger than the moon. Secondly, they simultaneously recognize that the sun just so happens to also be 400 times further away than the moon. And finally, they also recognize that the moon moves approximately two inches away from the earth every year. And therefore it is only because of the sun's exact size in relation to the moon, precisely corresponding to its distance from the moon and our specific location and period of time in the solar system that we as human beings on planet earth are able to experience the moon perfectly eclipsing the sun as if they were the exact same size. My friends, as we're going to see today, a total solar eclipse is not a cosmic coincidence, but rather the demonstration of our God's creative providence. As astrophysicist Jason Lyle has rightly stated, as we consider the magnificent intricacy of a living cell, the complexity, and the amazing diversity of life on earth and the mathematical precision of the laws of physics and chemistry, these are all indicative of the incomprehensible creativity, intelligence, and power of our creator.

So with that reality in mind as we continue walking our way through the creation account in Genesis, we find ourselves in day four where we see God creating the luminaries of light. **Day 4, The Luminaries of Light.** And we pick back up where we began our reading today, verse 14. If you look there with me. Once again, Moses continues their writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit saying, "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 the two great lights. The greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night and the stars. And God set 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."

On this fourth day of the creation week, God opens his divine lips as it were, and he speaks once again, always creating through the proclamation of his word. This time for celestial light bearing bodies to fill the expanse. In other words, he takes the existence of light he created back on day one and he powerfully bestows it upon these newly created massive celestial bodies placing them in the expanse he created on day two to primarily accomplish a threefold purpose. And that threefold purpose our text tells us is to separate, to serve and to shine. To separate, to serve and to shine. And so in terms of the first stated purpose, we find that it is to ***separate light from darkness. To separate light from darkness.*** And we see this both in verse 14 and in verse 18. Our all-powerful sovereign God, Elohim, has designed, created, and placed these massive entities of sun, moon, and stars in the heavens to help his soon-coming image-bearers who have not yet been created to distinguish the day from the night so that we might have a rhythm to our lives, knowing when to work and when to rest and when to rise and when to sleep.

I think we often overlook the kindness of God in this. I was reflecting on this just yesterday. We experience the consistent pattern of night and day every single day and yet we frequently fail to express our gratitude to God for that rightly. The separation God has blessed us with is so natural to us as we go about our days that it blends in almost imperceptibly and it becomes something we tend to absentmindedly ignore. And yet like clockwork, quite literally it occurs over and over and over again. My friends, it is vitally important for us to understand that this is a divine gift given to by the hand of our gracious God. Rather than chaos and confusion, the Lord has created this intrinsic cadence to provide our lives with order and rhythm and organization. Why? Because our God is a God of order and stability. So the first purpose of the sun, moon, and the stars is for separation. But then secondly, our text tells us in verse 14 that these celestial bodies have also been created by God ***to serve as measurements of time. To serve as measurements of time.***

Specifically our text says in verse 14 as signs and seasons and for days and years. And once again, this is for none other than us, the image bearers of God. That Adam and Eve and all of those who would come after them would be able to keep track of time so that we could steward over God's creation according to the mandate that he would soon give. And again, how often do we overlook the goodness of God in this gift that he has given? Not only is this the way that we are able to keep track of time, of which if we're being honest today, we waste far too much, but it's also the only way that we can truly ask the Lord what Moses does in Psalm 90 verse 12 when he says, so teach us to number our days. Why? That we may get a heart of wisdom.

Likewise what David prays in Psalm 39:4 when he says, "Oh Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days. Let me know how fleeting I am." What does he mean? Well here today and we're gone tomorrow. In the grand scheme of things, we're here for an instant. It's only through the service provided by these celestial bodies that we are able to measure each passing day. And in doing so, by God's grace, seek to grow both in our wisdom of his word, that is who he has revealed himself to be, what he has revealed to us about what he's accomplished for us in Christ and who he has called us to be. And in light of all of that, our recognition of how

truly finite we really are. Especially in comparison to how infinite he is. So the second purpose then for the sun, moon and stars is not to be served but to serve humanity in that way.

Thirdly, as we see at the end of verse 15, we find that God has also placed these lights in the heavens *to shine upon the earth. To shine upon the earth.* Our text specifically says and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth. And so of course that statement is packed with so much more than just photons of light. In addition to providing us with a form of light during both the day and the night, the sun and the moon have such a critical relationship to the earth that they literally enable us to live upon it. For example, we now know that the earth orbits the sun in perfect proximity and with perfect precision. And think about this in light of everything we just mentioned about the eclipse. The sun is approximately 93 million miles away. And yet if the earth was orbiting only slightly closer or slightly more distant around the sun, the existence of water on our planet and the water cycle would be impossible.

In fact, we ourselves with only a slight change in that degree of orbit would either freeze to death or melt away. If just the orbital tilt of our planet, which currently sits at 23.4 degrees changed only slightly, it would drastically affect our climate with the potential of making earth unlivable. From there, even if the duration of the Earth's rotation around the sun were either faster or slower, it would dramatically impact the ability for life to be sustained on our planet. But in addition to all of that, we simultaneously find the perfect proximity and perfect precision of the moon's relationship to the earth as well. With the diameter of the moon about the size of the continental United States, the moon's unique size and orbit stabilizes that tilt I just mentioned as the earth revolves around the sun. But also as the earth revolves around the sun, keep in mind that the moon is revolving around the earth and it is the moon's gravitational pull upon the earth that maintains our ocean's tides consistently every day going in and out, in and out.

Scripture tells us that God has not only created this, that Christ himself is not just our creator, but that he is also the sustainer of all of this that is taking place every moment of every day. All of this is found within the strategic and intentional design of our God, accomplished just as effortlessly as our text says and it was so. And my friends, let me just ask you with all of that in mind by the way, is merely scratching the surface of all that we know to be true considering all of that complexity and creativity and power put on display as experience trials and challenges in your life today, what is too difficult for our God?

Whatever circumstances that you may be dealing with or burdens that you may have carried with you into this congregation today, right now the power and beauty of creation should remind you that nothing is too difficult for our God. Nothing is too difficult for our God. Not only is he sovereign over your circumstances, but if you are trusting in Jesus Christ his son, then scripture says that he is with you and that he is for you and that he is working all things after the counsel of his will for his glory and for your good. He is that good shepherd from Psalm 23 who walks before us even along the path where the shadow of death itself casts its heavy darkness. So may we trust him because the brilliance of the sun and the splendor of the moon, as amazing as they are, infinitely pale in comparison to the love that God has for his children. So may we trust him.

As we continue, I want us to notice that unlike God did with some of his previous creations on days one through three, as we see in our text, he does not give names to these massive light sources of day and night. We of course know them by their names and we've been using those names today, sun and moon. But of course Moses also knew them by their Hebrew names. But it's as though God here intentionally withholds calling them by their name. So why would he do that? Well, it's important for us to understand that these God-breathed words of scripture come forth in their original context against a cultural backdrop of polytheism that is the worship of multiple false gods and astrology. As one commentator noted in neighboring cultures, the sun and the moon were some of the most important gods, lowercase G, in the pantheon. And the stars along with their constellations were often credited with controlling human destiny. That's astrology.

So contrary then to the vain superstitions and the imaginative speculations of the surrounding polytheistic people groups, Genesis comes forth confronting those mythological beliefs with the truth and declaring that the sun and the moon are not cosmic deities worthy of our worship, but rather that they are nothing more than luminescent entities created and existing under the all-powerful hand of the sovereign lord of the cosmos. To put it another way to God, the sun and the moon respectively are nothing more than a light bulb and a nightlight.

Although our galaxy alone, which we call the Milky Way, exists among the other innumerable galaxies, God has created and contains over 100 billion stars. Think of that. It is as though God simply adds those to our text for good measure essentially saying, oh, by the way and the stars. And yet God's word tells us as well in Psalm 147:4, that he determines the number of the stars. And in addition to that, he gives all of them their names. Following the repeated pattern of God said, and God made and God saw, the Lord completes day four of his creation by looking upon what he has made and recognizing the glory of its goodness saying and there was evening and there was morning the fourth day. And my friends along with seeing the sheer wisdom and power of the God who has created these massive celestial bodies in both brilliance and splendor, scripture also wants us to give gratitude to God for his love and goodness.

In other words, the power and the creativity and the design that we see put on display in all of creation was never intended to be divorced from the character of his goodness and his love. This is the idea that the Psalmist is driving home in Psalm 136 verses 1-9 As he uses this repeated emphasis again and again for the purpose of highlighting this very point for us. Saying Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of Gods for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of Lords for his steadfast love endures forever. To him who alone does great wonders for his steadfast love endures forever. To him who by understanding made the heavens for his steadfast love endures forever. To him who spread out the earth above the waters for his steadfast love endures forever. To him who made the great lights for his steadfast love endures forever. The sun to rule over the day for his steadfast love endures forever. The moon and stars to rule over the night, and we can say it together, for his steadfast love endures forever. And so with that gratitude and his steadfast love

in our hearts, we reflect as his people. And in doing so, we continue walking and journeying through Genesis, specifically through verses 20 and 23 where we will discover day five and God creating *the animals of sky and sea*. **Day five, the animals of sky and sea**. Moses continues riding saying, "And God said, 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.' 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. 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."

So at the start of day five with the warm sunlight of the newly created sun now shining down upon the earth, God pierces as it were, the sound of the wind and the waves with his voice. As he does our poetic God uses a figure of speech weaving poetry into the landscape of creation. The Lord says here in the original Hebrew, let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures and let the flying creatures fly. And by using that figure of speech, it provides emphasis to the expression of creation. The text is highlighting here both the magnitude and the weightiness of the action that God is performing in this moment. This is a dramatic eruption, if you will, of the sea bursting forth with every imaginable type of sea creature in an instant. And likewise, it is an instantaneous flurry of activity in the sky as birds and flying creatures begin to soar through the air.

Where once there was emptiness with no creatures in a moment they're now soaring and teeming with all of these creatures that God has created. The canvas of God's masterpiece is now filled with living, breathing, swimming and soaring creatures. Life is all around. And yet as one commentator noted, the architect of the universe does not let the colors of his canvas run together. For each type of animal he creates as we see repeated again and again and again in our text, will only produce animals of their own kind. Once again, our God is a God of order.

It's interesting to note here that there is a specific mention of the great sea creatures. The word for sea creatures is a word that is sometimes translated in English as dragons. Some have made the connection between this very reference in our text and the animal described by God in Job 41. We won't read the entire description, but I would encourage you to do that on your own at some other point because it's interesting that in verses 18 through 21 of that chapter, God describes this creature known as the Leviathan. And he says this. "His sneezing flash forth light and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn. Out of his mouth go flaming torches. Sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke as from a boiling pot and burning rushes, his breath kindles coals and a flame comes forth from his mouth."

So why would the Lord intentionally here in this text mention the great sea creatures amongst all of the other creatures he has made on this fifth day of creation? Well, once again, as we think about the original context to the Canaanites and other surrounding people groups, the great sea creatures were powerful and, in some cases, even divine from their perspective. Divine creatures of chaos and destruction that stood as enemies and equals to their false gods. And yet to use the

words of one commentator, the one true and living God has no equals. There may be rebels in his kingdom, but there are no rivals. In other words, while some mythological beliefs held that the great and powerful dragons and sea creatures were to be feared and even worshiped, Genesis once again comes forth declaring the truth. That even the mightiest of these creatures are nothing more than creations of the one and only God, who alone is worthy of our worship.

Adding to the emphatic activity of life in both sky and sea, I want us to notice from verse 22 that these animals were not created to be static or stagnant. On the contrary, God created these swimming and soaring creatures to multiply. And we see that through the very first instance of God explicitly blessing. And so if you are one who likes to underline things in your Bible, then I would encourage you to underline that very point. For the very first time. In God's self-revelation, we see this concept of God graciously offering his beneficial power for a particular purpose. And just as we see here in our text, what we discover throughout scripture is that there is a direct connection between the blessing of God and the fruitfulness of his creation, both in the physical and in the spiritual. In other words, we find that the fruitfulness of God's creation flows directly from the gracious blessing of God's hand. Without God's blessing, there is no fruitfulness. And here as it is in virtually every other context, the blessing of God is also connected to the commands of God. Not by merit, mind you, but by grace. For it is his word alone that brings forth life. As we see in our text, God blesses and then he commands for these animals of sky and sea to be fruitful, to multiply and to fill the earth.

Not only will we see a similar type of command in the creation mandate that God will later give to Adam and Eve, but we also see it in the new creation mandate found in the Great Commission, which God has given to the church. By his grace and according to his abundant blessings, the church is called to be a fruitful people. We also are not called to be stagnant, but rather we are called to multiply by making disciples and by filling the earth with his glorious gospel. Just as we celebrated just one week ago that through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the seed of the gospel would result in a harvest of souls springing forth to salvation and eternal life. Disciples making disciples and churches, planting churches. And from that command of blessing following the consistent pattern, our text says that it was evening and there was morning the fifth day.

That brings us today to our final two verses. And it's there that we discovered day six and God's creation of *the creatures of the earth. Day six, the creatures of the earth.* And in verses 24 and 25, we read these words. "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 just like the previous day of the creation week, God begins the sixth day of creation with a command of creativity and a declaration of design. And in response every type of creature and organism which lives upon the land with the exception of human beings, which we will look at next time, have been created. As our text goes on to say 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. And it is that

goodness of God as the master artist and a sovereign creator that I want us to conclude our time together today. As one preacher has said so well, you cannot see the beauty of the stars in the midday sky because the light of the sun eclipses them. However, after the sun sets and the sky becomes black as pitch, you see the stars in the full force of their splendor. So it is with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can only see its true beauty against the backdrop of our sin. The darker man appears, the brighter the gospel shines. So my friends, let me ask you today as we prepare to close our time in God's word, can you see the beauty of the gospel? Do you see the dark pitch-black backdrop of your own sin? And can you see the gospel shining forth in great contrast? If so, then I want to compel you to turn from that darkness and to run to the light. Cling to Christ and cast your soul upon the only Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Like the moon reflects the sun, God has created us as his image bearers and if you are a believer today has redeemed us to reflect the glory of his son. And therefore, if we are truly a new creation in Christ, then make no mistake. That means that God has lovingly and graciously chosen to place his divine love and his divine blessings upon you. And in doing so, like he did in the first triad of the original creation as the divine potter, he is now forming and shaping you according to his word into the image of Christ. Increasingly so.

Like he did in a second triad, he has filled you with his Holy Spirit and is continuing to shine the light of his glory into your life, to bless you and to keep you and to bring forth the life of creativity that he has prepared for you. And like the celestial luminaries he created, he has recreated us in Christ Jesus to be separate from sin. To serve him and his church, and to shine the light of the gospel throughout the entire world, beginning in our own neighborhoods and stretching out to the nations. That the blessings of his hand would result in the fruitfulness of your life. And therefore, with that gracious blessing comes the command. The command that echoes from the pages of scripture in both the Old Testament and the new, be holy as I am holy declares the Lord. And by his grace, God will look upon the sanctifying work of his spirit within us, and he will proclaim with great joy, it is good. It is good. Pray with me.

Father, we thank you for the grace that you have bestowed upon us. We thank you for the work that you have begun in us and that you have promised to bring to completion. We thank you for your word which declares these rich truths of who you are, what you have done for us in Christ, and who you have called us to be. And that work is good because you are an infinitely good God. So we thank you today and I pray that according to your gracious blessings, you will cause us to be a fruitful people. Help us to honor you through the living of our lives and everything that we think, say, and do. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.