

The Earth Before It Was the World

Genesis 1: 1-5; 26-31

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Dawson**

**May 7, AD 2023
Gerrit Scott**

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” We have been made in the *image* of God. We think a lot about image and likeness these days. Especially in a college town where our athletes are making great money by licensing their Name, Image and Likeness. To be in someone’s image is to be a reflection of the other. A mirror image means we reflect accurately someone else. And we look in mirrors to see our image, to consider what exactly we are reflecting to the world.



We know what it is to look in a mirror as our face along with our bodies has changed rapidly. What do I see reflected back to me? Am I pretty? Am I as pretty as my friend is on social media? What about these zits? What about these eyebrows? I’m not little any more. I’m not grown. Who am I, the I that I see in the mirror?



We know what it is to look at the mirror with a bit of horror. When did it come to this? When did the lines get so

deep? When did my eyelids get so heavy? What about these marks from all the things I've had carved off? Ah, Dawson, dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return, sooner than you thought! Or we may, as we age look in the mirror and remember the young person we used to be. I still feel like that! Why don't I look it?

And which is our true image? Is it the innocent face of childhood? The untried, unspoiled beauty of youth? The solidity of being right in the middle years? The weathered wisdom that only comes from experience and age? And at any stage, what does my face reflect? Struggle? Loving and being loved? Pain? Hope? When someone sees my face, what do they see most reflected? Let's keep all those questions in mind as we consider what it means that God created the world and called it good. And created humanity in his image and called us *very* good. Let's think about the earth before it became the world. Life as it was intended before rebellion infected everything, and the world became synonymous with the place of humanity's sinful self-will.

The Genesis description of creation moves us with its sheer beauty. Reading aloud the entire first chapter creates a hush in the room. Order, rhythm, design, peacefulness, purpose, and hope fill our hearts. Let's note 3 Genesis Distinctives:

1) Created Vs. Emerging. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In other words, once upon a time, the world was not. Then God caused the world to come to be. Once upon a time, time began. Matter and energy did not always exist. The earth in its variety, its interdependent ecosystems, its resilience, complexity and sheer stunning beauty did not just emerge out of a process of random mutations and brute survival. What exists was intended. By God. That means you and I were intended. No matter the circumstances of our conception, we are not an accident. Each of us was created intentionally by God.

2) Superintended vs. Random. God did not create the world instantly complete. Rather God superintended a process whereby what was formless was shaped. What was empty became filled. There was rhythm and an order. And that continues to this day as life brings forth life, as the earth shifts on its tectonic plates, as seas rise and fall shaping the land, as the sun

flares and the winds blow. The earth has a real existence. So real that there are dangerous forces at play. But it is not out of control. The triune God shapes, contains, and orders all things, even as he gives his creation a real existence according to constant, reliable laws.

3) Moral Vs. Arbitrary. The refrain after each day of creation is, “And God saw that it was good.” The heavens and the earth, matter, energy, and natural processes are good creations of God. The Bible’s view of creation stands in stark contrast to other views of matter as evil, as inferior to spirit, such as the Greeks held. Moral value exists in creation. The Creator declared creation in all its beautiful complexity to be *good*. That means that moral laws exist in creation just as much as physical laws. All morality is not merely a cultural construct used by the powerful to control their subjects. Rather, there is a good we all innately know and on which our written laws must be based.

Such a view of creation creates peace and order, secure boundaries within which life can reproduce and flourish. So specifically today, in this overview, let’s look at the creation of humanity and 3 Genesis Distinctives About Humanity:

1) Humanity is Distinctly in the Image of God. What is it that makes human people the image of God in a way that mountains, plants and other animals are not? Uniquely, we’ve been given *consciousness*. We are aware that we exist. And we are aware that we will die. No other animal actively contemplates its own death. Which means no other animal actively thinks about what it means to be alive. I think my dog feels a sense of purpose in being loyal to stay by me. I know she feels purpose in begging for food! But she does no reflection on whether that purpose is good, whether it is the best for her and the world. She does not worry that she has gone mostly deaf. She does not know that before long she will cease. She does not consider how to relate to her Creator. Only people do that.

Speech is unique to humans. Yes, of course, communication exists among other creatures. The way flocks of birds can suddenly change direction in harmony, whales can sound to one another across the miles, or frogs can woo mates after a rain. But this speech is limited. As much as I love *101 Dalmatians*, the dogs barking in the night are not really giving the whereabouts of Cruella da Ville. Dolphins are not writing Shakespeare. We

uniquely image the God who created by commands of speech, as we shape our lives and world through talking and writing.

Dominion is the other quality uniquely given to humanity. As the LORD rules over heaven and earth, so he gave the world to us, his image-bearers to care for, shape, subdue, live from and pass along. We don't have to feel guilty for breathing, eating, creating homes and industry. We have an endowed right to be here. Of course, that includes exercising dominion so that we have a bountiful, clean, sustainable world to pass on to future generations.

Years ago, our youngest daughter Mary-Emeline and I learned verses from Psalm 8. I loved the years we said them together, and sometimes even today we still do. Arms around each other, we look up at the stars and say, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have made, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him? Yet, you have made a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor." The vastness of creation defines us small. Yet God confers such dignity upon us that he knows us, loves us and gives to us this world.

2) Male and Female Make the Image of God. In the cultures surrounding God's people, the idea of the image of God, or the gods, existed. But that usually meant that the king, or pharaoh, was in the image of God while everyone else existed to serve the gods by serving the king. In other words, people were created to do work for the gods by being slaves to a ruler. In other cultures, men were more the image of God than women. But Scripture confers great dignity on all men and women. Each and every person is an image bearer of God. Peter reminds the men in the church to honor the women as both women and men are co-heirs "of the grace of life" (I Peter 3: 7). Where Christianity goes, the status of women rises.

This also means the image of God is relational. Men and women need each other. Imagine if the world was suddenly only men. The whole world a man cave filled with wrappers and empty cans and unwashed clothes and a whole lot of other stuff I can't say. Or what would it be like if the world was only women? I dare not speculate further. We need the unique gifts, emotional make-up and perspectives that the two sexes bring.

So here we pause to realize how in all simplicity and confidence, Scripture tells us that humanity is man and woman. It's a *binary*. That's not a bad word. That's a good thing. This goes all the way down to the cellular level. Two X chromosomes make a female. An X and a Y chromosome make a male. The chromosomal variations are rare and don't actually change the sex. We come in two sexes. It's not up to me to determine my sex. Acknowledging this reality reduces anxiety.

I would think to have an overwhelming feeling that one's body and mind were out of sync about one's sex would be a horrible conflict. Such dysphoria would make every hour feel like a contradiction, like you were a stranger in your own body. That's not a conflict I would wish on anyone. Yet this very conflict has risen in startling and unprecedented numbers, particularly among girls, in just the last decade. This has been accompanied by near-violent urgency to create a body-focused solution to the conflict which includes very expensive, powerful chemicals and/or radical, irreversible surgeries. The urgency and the dramatic interventions alone should raise an alarm for us. Especially given the research that over 80% of childhood gender dysphoria resolves in time. We will look back in a few years and wonder how we could ever have done this to our children. Meanwhile, the experience of such dysphoria in some children is real to them. They need our care. They need our caution and patience to save them from cultural urgency. They need our love to heal them in any aftermath.

3) Participation in Filling the Earth. Scripture praises the God who bring the universe into being out of nothing. God created the laws and processes by which the matter and energy he created gets shaped. Surely, such a God could have created the earth already filled with all the people he wanted. But he didn't. God said to us, "You get to make more!" Father, Son and Holy Spirit delighted to bring forth the universe out of the overflow of their love. Now we get to fill the earth out of the overflow of committed, loving relationships. Yes, of course, the union of husband and wife is at the heart of such fruitfulness. But also, think what happened once humanity in the image of God began reproducing. New relationships arose. Parents with children. Sibling relationships. Cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents. Friends. Work colleagues. Rivals. Trading with others: some of my unique skills, energy and products for some of yours. An entire

interdependent system of exchange: human economy. We share and store knowledge so we don't have to keep inventing motors or stitches or lathes. We build upon and improve what has gone before. God delights in these human interactions, friends and family, trading partners and mentors, all that goes into making the world a thriving, interesting, questing adventure. We fill the earth through this huge variety of relationships and interactions which make up life.

We know creation does not work like it was meant to, as reading further in Genesis will teach us. But we can envision and describe how life on earth was meant to be. Before the earth became the world that rebelled against the Creator. The echoes of his intent resound all around us. There is still so much beauty, so much love, so much possibility. Scripture continues to give us the guidelines, the laws, by which we may flourish. We still can dream of justice and harmony. And we're still called as creatures to acknowledge our creator and give him thanks.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the LORD, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.