

Introducing the Creator

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[0 : 0 0] It'd be worth keeping your Bibles open in front of you as we dig into this passage, the very opening of the whole of the Bible, verses that perhaps in some ways don't need much of an introduction.

Some are the most famous, some are the most foundational words in history. Really, this is a passage which is of overwhelming significance to Christianity as it sets the stage for everything that is to come.

It's great for us to look at as it sets that foundation for the rest of the Bible. And how does it do that? Well, it does that by introducing us to the God who is at the heart of the universe.

It does it by pointing us to the God who is at the heart of the universe. This is the Bible's creation account, but as is the case throughout Scripture, creation is to point us to the Creator.

In Genesis chapter 1, God is the subject, the one doing this stuff in every single verb in this chapter. It's all about Him as it begins, the Bible begins with God revealing Himself to us as He creates our universe.

[1 : 1 4] And our prayer is from looking at this passage this morning, that we would have a greater appreciation of that God and of what it means to be His people.

You might have noticed we didn't read the whole of chapter 1. Creation isn't finished yet. We've not read about God's creation of humanity, which is so incredibly significant. We're going to focus on that next week.

We'll get there a kind of a greater appreciation, I think, of who we are. But fittingly, the Bible begins with the focus on God Himself. This morning, we can get that greater appreciation just of who He is.

One last thing. It's worth saying there will be parts of this chapter, and particularly in these early chapters of Genesis as a whole, where people might have big questions or very strong opinions about things.

You might already be wondering things in your mind. What's He going to say about this or that? How old is the universe? Whatever else it might be. Just to say, we certainly don't want to duck those questions, but we want to be really clear that our aim here in Genesis, as it is wherever we are in the Bible, our aim isn't necessarily to have all of our questions that we might bring to the text answered, but our aim is to get to grips with what God wants to tell us through His Word, and what God thinks is really important.

[2 : 3 6] As we come to the Bible, we want God to set the agenda, and actually what He wants to say is what we need to hear most. So if there are those other questions, we'll try and touch on those things.

If there are other things at all over the next few weeks that you'd like to talk more about, do come and find me afterwards if you've got questions on anything. I'd love to chat about that. But let's dig in now. And let's look, how does God Himself introduce Himself to us in His Word?

And the first thing that we see is this. Really, this is kind of the headline over the whole of this chapter. We're going to see two other things this morning that they kind of fit underneath this major emphasis that the Bible begins with, which is this.

We see God, the Creator with ultimate authority. God, the Creator with ultimate authority. We are introduced here to a massive God.

In fact, not a massive God, but the massive God. With that emphasis that there is only one. Verse 1 of chapter 1 of the first book of the Bible.

[3 : 42] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He is the one who is there from the beginning. He is the one who brings everything into existence from nothing.

He is the one who speaks that refrain, and God said, and God said, and God said, and it happens. What's described here is not God kind of reworking things or doing a little bit of remodeling over here, you know, in the way I can make a pretty impressive Lego Friends treehouse out of a pile of bricks with the instructions.

But this is God starting from nothing and speaking our universe into existence. In fact, the word used in the original Hebrew for created there in verse 1 is a word bara.

It's only ever used of God. It's a word, this is something that only God can do. The point being that the reason there is something rather than nothing, the reason behind the universe that we live in and have our existence in is God, is the God of the Bible.

And because he is its maker, then he is also its master. Because he is its creator, he is also its king.

[5 : 00] And we see that really as God's authority is repeatedly presented through this chapter. Because as God creates, he also divides and he names.

Let me show you a couple of examples. Verse 3, have a look there. And God said, let there be light. And there was light. God creates and God saw the light was good.

And then we read on. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day. And the darkness he called night. You can see that pattern repeated again in verse 7.

God made the expanse and separated the waters. And verse 8, God called the expanse heaven. God creating, separating, calling, naming.

What's the idea here? Well, the point is it's because God makes that he is able to direct, to separate. You go there, you go there. It's like how a general can maneuver his troops.

[6 : 00] It's because he's in charge. It's a sign of his authority. Here we see that because God made it, God has control over it. And really naming is the same.

To be able to name something in the Bible shows authority over it. The same way, if I went out and I bought myself a dog, I could call him whatever I want because he's mine. I'm his master.

Well, God is master over his creation. He has that authority. He names what he has created and not vice versa.

There's nothing on par with God in his creation. There is this creator-creation distinction. The creator with authority over his creation.

And so why is it then so important for God's people to hear this? Why does the Bible open up emphasizing this to us? I think really it is to prevent people from ascribing to anything in creation.

[7 : 04] The glory, the authority, their loyalty, which is deserved by God the creator alone. The first readers of Genesis lived in an incredibly polytheistic society.

All sorts of gods. No shortage of gods around and things that people worshipped. But this creation account makes clear that the unique and ultimate authority of the God of the Bible.

And so the nations worshipped the sun god or the moon god. Well, Genesis chapter 1 points out how actually the true God, the real God, he made those lights. The greater light and the lesser light, it says.

He put them in place. And then at the end of that verse, verse 16, also casually, you know, and the stars. Just in case you attempted to worship them as many of the nations around did.

Still, they are just created things. That the creator is above them. And the same could be said of the trees, the sea creatures, some of the animals. All in different ways, deified or worshipped by the nations around them.

[8 : 12] But here, clearly put in their place in the creation column of that creator-creation divide. While God stands alone, God is the only name in that creator column.

He is the creator God with that ultimate authority over what he has made. Well, so then what difference does that make for us?

What's this passage here to teach us? How does it change how we live? I mean, there are so many things we could talk about, aren't there? But really, I think the heart of it, that the key is this.

If you forget everything else this morning, remember this one thing. That the creator God of ultimate authority is the God who we're called to follow and to submit to.

He is the king of our universe and he deserves our allegiance. And that opening message of the Bible that we see here is a huge challenge to humanity.

[9 : 17] Because we like to think that we are in charge and that we can choose what we do. And that opening message of the Bible cuts across the grain of human society, whatever our approach to life is.

Today, we live in what we would call a very secular society. Really, the definition of secular, it just means that God is separated out from the rest of life.

We have these different spheres, different areas of life. And God is simply one of those who shouldn't interfere with the other things. Because he doesn't interfere, because he doesn't have a place here, actually, we can get rid of him altogether if we like.

In terms of God, we can take it or leave it. And yet the Bible opens by making it clear that we can't just leave God because we live in his universe.

If you imagine a child with perfect parents, the kind of parents none of us are or ever have, but perfect parents who give birth to him, they provide a home for him, they give him everything he could need, they deal with him with nothing but love.

[10 : 24] You know, we'd hate to think of that child then just turning around and saying, well, I don't want my parents to have a part in my life. They have nothing to do with me. I don't want anything to do with them. Genesis 1 really shows the arrogance of a lifestyle that says, I have no place for God.

That cannot be the appropriate response as we live in the world that God created. He is the God of ultimate authority, whether we think that we like that or not.

But because this is his universe, because he has that authority, we cannot ignore him. The Bible opens with this challenge for those who think they want nothing to do with God.

But Genesis 1 also warns, I suppose, against the error at the other end of the spectrum, where kind of God is everywhere. We've mentioned the polytheistic world of the first readers of Genesis with lots of gods.

But actually what we might call or think of as these kind of spiritualist ideas are still strong today. And then actually somehow that idea that the universe itself is God.

[11 : 36] The idea of kind of mother nature pushed to its extreme. Or even the talk that we are all somehow part of God. Those are not unusual things to hear.

Or even on a kind of a mundane level, kind of checking horoscopes for guidance from the stars. But actually the creator-creation distinction that Genesis 1 reveals so clearly, again shows that that is not right.

It is not that God is in these things. It is not that God is a part of his creation. And these are the kind of vague misunderstandings, I think, that can even creep into the church, can even creep into how we think about God's world.

But Genesis 1 makes it very clear that it's that God is over these things. Creation might point us to God, but creation is separate from God.

There's only one object, if we can use that word, that deserves our worship, our loyalty, that can provide us with ultimate direction. And that is the one God who made all things.

[12 : 44] And so the Bible begins by introducing us to a God that is so unique, is so powerful, has such authority, that our only reasonable response is to worship him and him alone.

God the creator with ultimate authority. And in a lot of ways, as we said, that's kind of the headline. That's the thing to remember. God the king of the universe, and that summons to submit to him.

But there are some other key aspects of this passage that help fill up that picture, and actually, I think, help us see why that is such a good thing. Why it's great news that God is the king.

Why the Bible's creation account is far better than rival accounts, whether very ancient or very modern. Two particular things, I think, that are emphasized. The first is this, that we also see that God is the creator God with a precise care.

There is a precision. There is a detail. There is a genuine care communicated in these verses in how God creates our universe.

[13 : 50] God is the creator with precise care. One of the things, I don't know if this stood out to you as Heather was reading through that passage, is that there is such a clear structure in these verses.

There is pattern. There is repetition. It is organized. And the careful construction of these verses actually probably goes deeper than we notice as we read them ourselves.

In the original Hebrew, there is kind of patterns and links all the way through this. In Hebrew, the number seven, which kind of represents perfection, really, runs throughout this opening chapter of Genesis.

There are seven words in the first verse. There are 14 words in the second verse. There are seven days of creation. The word God is used 35. That's five times, seven times. Earth and heaven are both mentioned 21.

Three times, seven times. It was good seven times. This pattern that runs throughout the chapter. There's also this kind of bigger structure where there's a pattern of two sets of three days.

[14 : 54] So in days one to three, God gives the universe form, we might say, light and dark in day one, separating the waters in day two, the dry land in day three.

And then the second set of three days kind of corresponds to that as he fills that form. Where it was light and dark in day one, it is the sun and moon in day four. Where he separates the waters in day two, it is the birds and the fish that are created in day five.

Where he makes the dry land day three. It is the animals and humanity we'll see next week who will inhabit that land that are made in day six. These kind of two sets of three days where from without form and void or empty in verse two to with form the first three days and then filled in the second three.

And we could dig into that. Lots more you may or may not find that interesting or not, it's quite warm in here. You might start nodding off if we talk too much more about Hebrew structures and things like that.

But Hebrew scholars, whether Christian or not Christian, are quick to point out that Genesis 1 is this unique style of writing which is not found anywhere else in the Bible and is highly structured.

[16 : 10] It's not quite poetry and yet it's not quite kind of plain prose or the usual way of recording events. It's this unique and carefully constructed passage.

And that in itself is designed to reveal to us something about the God of this creation. That he is a creator with precise care.

And the point is you could never read through Genesis chapter one, even a casual read through and get to the end and think, oh, God just kind of threw the universe together without a second thought.

There is this deep care for God in his creation. A quick side note here as we think about this kind of idea of structure in Genesis 1, it's a good time perhaps to address one of the big questions people ask of this passage.

Well, how long did this process take? Are we talking about seven literal days or are we talking about a longer time span? There have been Christians throughout history and there will be perhaps in this room this morning Christians who absolutely hold to the authority of the Bible as the word of God and yet come to different conclusions here, different interpretations.

[17 : 23] Some will consider these as seven literal days and it is just that word for day in the text. They all say that God chose to create in that way. Some will look and say actually the structure, the stylistic nature of this passage means we're not necessarily dealing with a blow-by-blow historical record as we might write history today.

I think it's great as we start this series that this is one of those areas where the questions we might be bringing to the text here are not actually the questions the text is designed to answer and so we don't need to be dogmatic in our answers.

We don't need to say, well, it's 100% this. This is not the Bible's test of what is orthodox or not. The big point of this passage, which all Christians will agree with, is that God did create our universe however it was that he chose to do that and the very structure of these opening verses shows that however long that took, it was something that he did with a precise care.

And the reason then, the reason the Bible tells us this, the reason the Bible wants us to know about God's care in his creation is that it makes a real difference to what it means to live in God's world, God's universe.

It makes a real difference to live as one of God's people. We are here not because of chance, we are here not simply out of chaos, but we are here through the care of our creator.

[18 : 56] And because of that deliberate, that precise care of a creator God, we can expect then to find a meaning and a purpose in life.

Again, if our existence is simply random chance, there's no way we could ever find meaning behind that. You know, if I kind of randomly throw paint at a wall with no thought whatsoever, you can't then look at that, what's been produced, and find any deep or hidden meaning in it.

There's nothing there. But if I carefully think about it, if I sit down and create a picture, in my case, it would still be hopeless, it would still be rubbish, but at least you could meaningfully look at that and say, okay, I see what's happening here.

There is a meaning behind what's been created. And because of God's care in his creation of our universe, it shows there is a meaning to our life, to our existence here.

And the famous biologist Richard Dawkins obviously has a very different view to this. He has written, the universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.

[20 : 09] I think we're really going to see so clearly, and I'm so confident about this, over the next few weeks, that actually the Bible's account of a perfect but a fallen universe fits far better with our experience, far better with our observation and what Dawkins says there.

But at least to get back to that, Dawkins is consistent because he recognizes that if we remove God, what does he say we're left with? He says what we are left with is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.

That is not a universe, that is not an existence that we want. More importantly, that is not a universe, that is not an existence that is true because the Bible reveals to us a God who created with precise care and a God who continues to care for his creation.

And as we'll see so clearly as we finish chapter one of Genesis next week, that it has this particular care, this special care for humanity, for you and me, is created in his image.

The God of ultimate authority, the king of the universe, who we owe our allegiance to, is a caring God. And because he cares for his creation, we can expect to find a purpose, a meaning, a value in our lives that cannot be there if we don't accept the God who created it all.

[21 : 39] Genesis 1 is not random facts about creation. It is truth to encourage us by showing us the God behind his creation. And then the last thing we see here in these verses, which again is a kind of a bright, shining thread running through this passage, is that this is a God of abundant goodness.

Abundant goodness. We hear again another repeated refrain, and God saw that it was good, and God saw that it was good, and God saw that it was good. God makes with real care, yes, but not just so that things are kind of well organized, not just so that things are neat and tidy and just where they should be, but so that they're really good.

And part of what makes this good is the incredible variety which we're told that God creates. We see that all the way through. God doesn't just create our plant or one species, but he says there are plants, there are fruit trees, all according to their kind, meaning that there are countless varieties of these.

And we see that again in the water. Let the waters swarm with swarms of living things. This picture of kind of life and energy and fullness. Verse 25, on the land, 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.

This creation just bursting with life. One author calls this the super abundance of God in creation. God is not just abundant, he is far more than that.

[23 : 10] God didn't just get a kind of a rubber stamp and say we need a few birds, bam, bam, bam. We need a few fish over here, boom, boom, boom. Let's do an animal or two, bam, bam. That'll do. That's fine. I've kind of ticked all the boxes.

No, there is this seemingly inexhaustible variety in our universe where new species still are being discovered to this day. Over 17,000 species of butterfly alone, apparently.

And all sorts of other facts. We could spend the next hour listing incredible statistics, couldn't we, about the things that God has created. I think my favorite part in this passage on this theme are those three words at the end of verse 16, two words actually in the Hebrew where it just says, and the stars.

And the stars. In almost a footnote, we're reminded of God's creation of these inconceivably vast and distant and powerful phenomenon that we see in the night sky and also countless more that no human eye, no telescope, no infrared satellite will ever see.

Too far away for us to ever know about and yet still there, created by the God of all creation. This kind of over-the-top, abundant goodness.

[24 : 29] And again, to come back and ask that question, well, what does that mean? Why are we shown how God created all of this stuff far more than necessary? This excess, we might call it. And in some ways, it is pointing us back, I think, to the incredible power and majesty of our creator.

Absolutely, the heavens declare the glory of God. As Psalm 19 says, God is unlimited in his creation. But I think perhaps more than that even, right here in chapter one of Genesis, at the very start of the Bible, we're being shown that our God is a creator who is abundant in his goodness toward us.

Now, we are created to enjoy God's goodness and his bounty toward us. One commentator puts it like this, God has not created a world with just enough sustenance, variety, and abundance for survival.

But God has created a super abundant world fit to foster the flourishing of his creatures. The abundant goodness of creation is because of the abundant goodness of a God who creates in a way that we can marvel and enjoy and flourish in his creation.

I think we so often forget, the world so often forgets, the sheer goodness and generosity of God. Yes, God is a big God, absolutely.

[25 : 54] He's the God of complete power and authority. Yes, God is a God who cares, and that is great news. He is not distant, but he is intimately involved with his creation.

We have purpose, we have meaning, we have value. But the opening of the Bible also spells out to us in a wonderful, kind of diverse, multicolored super abundance that God is good.

That God is good, and that he wants us to share in that joy. That we're not created just to survive, but that we're here to thrive, and we do that as we live under his authority and his rule.

We set off in the very first page of the Bible on a trajectory, expecting good things from a good God. And we're going to bring this to a close then this morning by bringing, I suppose, what we have seen then of God and his creation, and I suppose holding beside that the world around us that we live in, that we experience.

Because it would be very easy, and it's very tempting to say, well, this is what God is like, this is the world God has made, and that's brilliant, and it is. It is good. It is very good. But actually, once we step outside after our service, or perhaps even in our minds right now, we see, we know that there are problems in our world.

[27 : 16] We recognize, actually, that there is suffering in our universe, that we are not in the perfection of Genesis chapter 21. There are glimpses of it all around us, but also there are huge kind of stains and distortions of it.

If that's what you're thinking, you're absolutely right, and I'd really encourage you to keep on coming back over the next few weeks where we will see in these first few chapters of Genesis the chance to kind of dig more deeply into why that is, why we experience the universe, the world the way we do, and why the Bible makes the best sense of the world that we live in.

But this morning, it is good just for us to come back and to look at these perfect beginnings where everything started. This perfect creation that we long for. And actually, to close this morning, remembering that God has made this possible again.

Remembering that we are not living in Genesis chapter 1, but we have that same God who is revealed to us in Genesis chapter 1. And we see that God most fully in the gospel where those same characteristics that we see in this passage in creation are repeated and magnified in his redemption of us.

We see God's precise care. That means that in his concern for his creation, and humanity is the pinnacle of that, that he has sent Jesus so that restoration is possible.

[28 : 49] So that the problems of our world, which we'll see are down to our fault and not God's, can be dealt with. We see God's abundant goodness, which means that he sent Jesus to suffer in our place so that actually we could come back to God.

So that we could come back and share in and rejoice in his joy. That we can celebrate that God is good. And it's in response to that that we continue through this life with God as our ultimate authority, the king of the universe, both the creator and the redeemer through Jesus Christ.

It's through that that we continue through this life to follow him. And that incredible truth that through Jesus we can know this creator God that Genesis 1 holds out to us.

That we live in his universe with him as our king. That universe is no longer perfect but the God who we follow is. And that incredible truth that the rest of the Bible will take to unfold and explore that through Christ he has made this perfection possible again.

As we continue in the meantime to live in his world, the perfect God revealed in his perfect creation. But an unchanging God that even though our world changes, he still is good.

[30 : 08] that he still does care. He still has that ultimate authority. And that he will use those things to one day restore all things to the perfection with which the Bible opens.

And the great news is that we can have through Christ a place in that for all eternity. Let's pray together. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.