

# The World About Us

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 September 2021

Preacher: James Lapping

[ 0 : 00 ] The first few minutes of the sermon were not recorded, so we pick up with James telling a story about his nephew. The reading was Genesis chapter 1, 2 to 25, and it's the same reading as the previous week, if you wish to hear it read.

Josh will build stuff out of Legos, and I'll look at it, and it will be a bit of a mess. And I won't understand what's going on. But then he'll start explaining it, and he'll say, well, this is the bit that you walk through here, and this is the rocket launching bit here.

And I'm like, oh, yes, I'm beginning to see and understand. And I can only really relate to that creation if I relate to it in the way that Josh has intended.

And so we see there, while creation depends on God in our first point, What we're going to see next is creation is nevertheless distinct from God.

And that's our second point. Creation is distinct from God. And what we see in this passage is that although God creates everything, He doesn't inhabit everything.

[ 1 : 08 ] Creation, the thing that is made, is distinct and separate from our Creator, from God. And we see this in this passage.

And though we see God speaking, and we see Him observing His creation, and God saw, we don't see Him inhabiting His creation.

And so we can conclude there's not a little bit of God in each of us. That thing that some Hindu folk believe, or panentheists, and that, that there's a bit of God in each of us that draws us near to God. And it's very tempting to think like that, isn't it? To think that there's a little bit of God in each of us, and in the different bits of creation.

And that if I worship that thing, then I'm worshiping God and drawing near to God. So it's very tempting to do that. So let's just think through how we might be tempted to do that in our day-to-day lives.

[ 2 : 10 ] The first thing, the first obvious one there is idolatry. And it's perhaps not a big thing for us here, but you imagine the person who finds a piece of wood, and they carve it, and they turn it into a statue, and they bow down at it, and they think that there's a bit of God in that creation.

And they can control God. And so they can keep God at arm's distance. He's not God over everything. And that's a very appealing idea.

But another way that we might see God as inhabiting creation is we might enjoy mountaineering, or we might go to Iona, and we might call that a thin space.

And that's a place where God is more apparent in His creation than elsewhere. And we see lots of that in Scotland. We might be someone who goes up and climbs a Monroe, and we think that's the place where we're going to meet God.

God is more alive and present there, when really Monroe's are a bit like deserts, aren't they? You go up there, particularly if it's a high one, maybe a really high one, top of Ben Nevis, it's just rocks, and there's no life, no flourishing there.

[ 3 : 25 ] It's not perhaps the place where you might expect to see the abundance and flourishing of God. Or we might see God inhabiting bits of creation in the activities that we do.

So you might be someone who enjoys wild swimming, and you think the place where I experience God or feel revived in my life is when I go for that swim in the loch.

And that's when I feel excited. That's when I experience God. And we get out of the loch, and we're slightly covered with slime, and we're a bit freezing, and we wonder, is God really there?

Or alternatively, you might be someone who enjoys eating lots with your friends, and that's a good thing to do. But you think, I find God in having a meal with all my friends, and that's the thing that's going to give me satisfaction and joy in life.

And while our friends might be believing, and they might have God's Holy Spirit, and it is an excellent thing to share meals with friends, in that activity, that's not the place that God inhabits. [ 4 : 37 ] See, God is distinct from creation. And so if everything else were to cease to exist, if this world was to explode and disappear, and the universe would disappear, God would still exist.

God is our creator. He's completely different, in a different zone, whereas our world is his creation. We are creatures, and he is the creator.

And the creation, while being distinct from God, what we see is it is nevertheless very good, and that's our third point. Creation is good.

Our physical world is very good. It's a great place to be. And we see that repeatedly in this passage. Whenever God makes something, he sees that it was good.

And then if you cast your eyes slightly further, to chapter 1, verse 31, God looks at all that he has made, and what he saw, that it was very good.

[ 5 : 45 ] Everything that God had made was very good. And it's wonderful that we can make things out of wood, that we can carve a beautiful chair, or restore it, and place it in our lounge.

That's a wonderful thing to do. Or it's a glorious thing to climb a Monroe, and see the amazing thing that God has made, and how good it is, and how wonderful he is as a creator.

And it might be very therapeutic, and very relaxing, to go for a wild swim, and enjoy that, and enjoy a meal with friends. All those things are very good things to do, because they have been made by God.

And so they are not to be thought of as not good. And what we see, so in verse 3, we see God makes a light. But then in verse 14, he qualifies these as stars.

And you look up at the stars at night, and they're beautiful. They're stunningly beautiful. The sun and the moon. Maybe you've walked down Great Western Road, on a summer's evening, and you've seen the moon, sitting like a giant pink pancake, at the top end of Great Western Road.

[ 7 : 01 ] Stunningly beautiful. Right in the middle of the city. And then in verse 6, in verse 20, we see how God makes the waters, and the lakes, and the seas.

And maybe you've gone down to the lakes, and the Lake District in England, or you've gone up to the lochs in Scotland. And they've been amazingly beautiful. And you might have gone to the ocean somewhere, and you've seen wonderful animals in the sea, or birds in the air.

And it's stunningly beautiful. We might not all be sea people. Personally, I can't get enough of the sea. I'm absolutely mad about it. But when we go into it, we see wonderful creatures, like turtles and porpoises up in Scotland.

It's amazing. And God made these things, and it's absolutely stunning. God made the world, and it is stunningly beautiful. Scotland is stunningly beautiful.

But for us today, there's lots of confusion over the physical world. See, lots of us think that it's not good. We think of our physical world as a bad space, as a hostile space, as an unsafe space.

[ 8 : 14 ] So we might retreat into our online world, into a virtual world, into video games or social media, and we might retreat into that.

Or we might see it in our attitudes towards our bodies. We might think that our physical bodies aren't good, and we struggle with that, and we wonder, how can that be good?

And we might think that our bodies betray us, in some instances. And we'll think more on that topic in the coming evening, so I won't talk too much about that now. But it might also be that, if our physical world is bad, then the way to be seen as spiritual is to shun the physical world, to say no to the physical world.

And so we say stuff like, my physical body is not who I am. It's who I think I am in my head. That expression, that's the real me. This outward bit, that's not me.

Or we might say, I'm only going to eat certain foods. I'm only going to wear special clothes. I'm going to dedicate my life to a life of singleness, and say no to lots of good things that God has made.

[ 9 : 30 ] And we say, those people are the real spiritual people, while forgetting that the world that God has made is good. Genesis 1 says that everything that God has made is good.

The physical world is good. It's there to be enjoyed, to be delighted in, to revel in, to see that God has made it for us and for our enjoyment.

And then finally, we see creation is orderly. And so we see this in the way that this account of creation is written. It's written in a very careful and orderly fashion.

We see the repeated days. And the first three days, God forms something. And then in the second three days, we see God filling something.

And you might want to go home and draw that out tonight and do that. And that might be a fun activity, after church activity, or something like that. And we see the process of creation is a process where God brings order to creation.

[10:43] So verse 4, He brings light out of darkness. Verse 7, He separates the seas and the skies. Verse 9, He separates the seas and the oceans from the continents.

In Psalm 104, it's a celebration of the order that God has put in as a sign of God's goodness to us. And this order, the orderliness of creation, is a sign of God's goodness to us, isn't it? We couldn't have farming if there weren't seasons. We wouldn't be able to look at the world if it wasn't ordered. When, at the moment, with the climate controversies, and those issues, we're seeing this order unraveling, and that's bad, and that's scary, and we see that as scary and not helpful.

And this order that God gives makes science possible. So I remember as an 8-year-old, maybe you, maybe some of, anyone know Halley's Comet?

[11:49] No? Yes, Halley's Comet. It's the only comet that you can see with your naked eye twice. in your lifetime, that it's possible to see it.

And I remember on the 11th of April, 1986, as a young 8-year-old, standing, watching up at the sky, wanting to see this comet come past.

And I'm looking forward to the 28th of July, 2061, God willing, hopefully I'll still be there, when I'll be able to see the comet come around again.

It's amazingly ordered and precise. We can explore creation, we can do things in creation, because God has made it ordered.

And sometimes we struggle to see that God is a God of order and that He has ordered His creation. So sometimes I think we've got a cartoon version of God.

[12:45] We think of Him as someone with lightning bolts who likes to wreck stuff or something like that and He's weird and wonderful and He does all the strange things and that's the stuff we focus on.

But we find it hard to believe or exceptional to believe that God is a God of order. That's mundane, that doesn't seem very God-like, but it's wonderful that God is a God of order.

And our temptation is to think that, well, science, that's the thing that brings order. And God is the God of the bits that we can't explain from science. He operates in those weird and wonderful gaps not explained from science.

But the view that Genesis gives us is that the order that we see about us in fact points to God as evidence of God.

The explainability of the world about us is not evidence of God's absence, but that He is there, the way that He has ordered His world.

[13:56] So, from these opening verses, we see that creation depends on God. We've noticed that creation is nevertheless distinct from God.

That creation is good. It's something to be enjoyed and to be reveled in. And we've seen that creation is ordered and that is a sign that it has been made by God.

But I wonder if you spotted the remarkable surprise in this passage, the hint that we get in this passage. And it's a real surprise here because what we have here is a hint of God's plan for the world and how His creation fits into that.

And we'll explore more of that next week. But just to explain very quickly now. You see, it's rather surprising that instead of us being another animal, Genesis 1 sees us as having a distinct place in creation.

So, as we've gone through this description of Genesis 1, as we've read through it, the author Moses, he focuses on all the aspects of creation and he's very careful to write this, which are mostly relevant for us as people and their relationship to us.

[15:26] He writes it from the perspective of what is important to us as people. And so, just notice he describes the creation of the earth, our home, and most of this passage is about that, about how God made earth, planet earth.

But the rest of the cosmos takes three words, and the stars. And then we notice how he describes the plants in verses 11 and 12, and he doesn't classify all the plants, he doesn't give them phylum and genus and scientists can correct me about this afterwards.

He doesn't do that kind of classification. He simply says, there are plants and trees and seeds and fruits. He focuses on the bits that are useful to us, the bits that we eat.

And then verse 14, 15, he describes the stars and the sun and the moons. And the bit that he highlights there is simply that they're there to keep the time, to monitor the seasons, the bits that we are important.

And then the land animals, 24, 25, he describes them as the things we eat, livestock, the things we flee, the beasts of the field, and the things we squish, the creeping things.

[16:48] It's all related to us. And so everything in these opening verses hints at God's plan, which we're going to unpack in the next coming weeks, and where we fit in to God's plan there.

We aren't simply a bunch of molecules pulled together. We are at the center of God's plan. I wonder if you noticed that as you read through that. Was Moses just making a mistake there?

I don't think so. He's writing very carefully for us to understand that. And the point of Genesis is not to provide an exhaustive manual, on how the world was made and created, but in order to introduce us to our creator and to speak about our place in his creation.

And so although in Genesis 1 we learn how God created all things and how we have an important place in his plan, in the New Testament, in the book of Colossians chapter 1, we read how God made all things through his son Jesus.

And we should have a slide with this verse up. I'll just read it for us. The son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, powers, rulers, or authorities.

[18:15] All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.

So Jesus is the image of God in Jesus and through Jesus. God created all things. He's alive and active in Genesis 1.

All things are dependent on him. In him all things hold together. In Jesus we see God's perfect goodness. He lived a perfect life on earth.

In Jesus we see God who has come near to his creation as a person. He's a creator and yet he's distinct and yet he's come near.

And in Jesus we see God's perfect order. He lives a perfectly ordered life to bring us to know God.

And in Jesus we see God's perfect plan for which all things have been made.

[19:21] It's all for him. And we're going to unpack that over the next few coming evenings in Genesis 1 2 4. Let's pray as we close.

So Father we thank you for who you are. We thank you for the creation that you have made.

Please help us to think through what it means that you have made this creation. To think through our place in your plan for your creation.

Please help us to think about these things this week. To ponder about them. To dwell on them. To go back and read these verses again. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.