

Who Do You Think You are? (#TryChurch)

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[0 : 00] The first reading this evening is from Genesis chapter 1, which I think is on page 3 of your church Bible. Not quite as easy to find as you might imagine.

So Genesis chapter 1 and reading from verse 1. Okay, Genesis chapter 1, reading from verse 1.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness he called night.

And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day. And continuing at verse 31. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

[1 : 18] And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing.

So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy. Because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

And the second reading is from John chapter 1. So the Gospel of John chapter 1. That is on page 1063 in the church Bibles.

So John chapter 1, and reading again from verse 1.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made.

[2 : 29] Without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And continuing at verse 14. The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, This is the one I spoke about, when I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me, because he was before me.

Out of his fullness, we have all received grace, in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God, and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

[3 : 43] Amen. Thanks, Graham, for reading. Let me add my word of welcome. My name is Martin Ayres, if you've not met before.

I'm the senior pastor here. And especially, you're welcome if you're visiting us. We hope that all our services are accessible. And we kind of do tonight, in a way that means that if you're visiting, because it's Tri-Church, you came back next week, it wouldn't look that different.

And Sunday by Sunday, we do have guests who come along. But in particular, this is one of our Tri-Church Sundays, as Simon mentioned, and we hope you'll find that helpful if you've not been to church for some years, or you've never been before.

Now, it's my custom to pray so that we ask for God's help when we turn to the Bible as his word. So let's bow our heads, and I'll just lead us in a short prayer. Father, mighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to think about who you are and who we are because of you.

We pray that your spirit, the spirit of truth, will be with us now and help us know the truth and respond rightly. For we ask in Jesus' name.

[5 : 03] Amen. Now, if you're willing to help me and, I guess, check what I'm saying, you would look at, if you could turn back to Genesis chapter 1, that would be great.

And we'll be mainly in there on page 3. And then there's an outline inside the notice sheet, so you can just see where we're going if you'd find that helpful.

It's brilliant to be here tonight. We're starting a new series that we're running through the Sunday evenings, looking at just the first few chapters of Genesis, the first chapter of the Bible.

When Jesus of Nazareth wanted to help people understand God's design for us, he pointed them to Genesis. He pointed them back to this book.

It's a book that helps us make sense of our world and make sense of ourselves. But before we look at what Genesis 1 does say, it's worth clarifying, maybe, what it doesn't say, what it's not about.

[6 : 02] When it comes to the cosmos, to the universe, to the world, to us, what Genesis 1 here calls the heavens and the earth, the kind of the universe and the world, the first chapters of Genesis, they're not really concerned with the same kind of questions we look to in modern science.

In science, we're mainly concerned with questions like what and how. Genesis chapter 1, I think, for my money, is concerned with questions like who and why.

A lot gets written today about this chapter and I remember once a friend of mine being asked in a Q&A; in his church when I was there about whether Genesis chapter 1 was to be taken literally and he said, I feel like you could have just thrown a grenade in the room because there's so much, so many different opinions about that and some of them held quite strongly and people will read Genesis chapter 1 and say, well, what about evolution and what about the dinosaurs?

They don't seem to be mentioned here and things. And there are different views within our church family at St. Silas about how to read these early chapters of Genesis. I'd want to say that we know that Genesis chapter 1, when it has this structure of different days that you see in verse 8 and verse 13, it describes these different days of a week of creation, we know that it can't mean days as we know them because it's on the fourth day in verse 14 that God creates the sun and the moon.

So days as we understand them are not being reflected here in Genesis chapter 1 and I think we can tell that on its own terms this chapter is not meant to be a literal account of how things were made in order because the order seems to be different in chapter 2.

[8 : 00] In chapter 2 verse 5, so long before there was modern science and a deeper understanding of how things came to be, early Christians were not reading Genesis chapter 1 in a literal kind of way.

What we're looking at is a different kind of literature. It's extremely carefully put together and I think it's helpful to keep in mind that the questions it's looking to answer are different kinds of questions.

They're questions that confront what people were believing then about what kind of gods there might be and how people might have been made. I think it's helpful to think of Genesis 1 as just a different kind of literature, more like a song or a poem that teaches us vital things that we need to hear about the origins of our universe and life and the God of all this.

And with this for our church tri-service, I kind of realized about 15 minutes before the service started that I'd given this evening two titles on the outline there.

I called it Prepare to Meet Your Maker but with the tri-church services we're trying to answer questions and the question we put for tonight was who do you think you are?

[9 : 16] But that actually works really well. I read a book a few years ago by a guy called Andrew Wilson called If God, Then What? If God, Then What? And he's saying well if the God of the Bible is there what are the implications for us?

And really we see that tonight we're going to begin to see that as we'll see it unfold in the coming weeks as we prepare to meet our maker and say if God and what is God like then who are we?

What are the implications for us? So our first point this evening that Genesis 1 reveals to us is that there is a God of ordered creation and you can see that order in the account because there's this progression through the chapter let's pick things up again in verse 1 he says in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth now the earth was formless and empty and if we just pause there we then have God's creative work divided for us into six days and broadly the first three days are about things being formed and then the next three are about those formed things being filled so that what was formless gets formed and what was empty gets filled and then in chapter 2 verse 1 over the page we read thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array so what's this revealing to us about God we're going to dive in a bit more deeply to this chapter next week but as we even look at it in this introduction this week we could use words about God couldn't we that he's powerful that he's a designer that he's creative and what is the cosmos like what is creation like well it's made thoughtfully planned it's ordered it's ordered in fact it was belief in this first chapter of Genesis that was the foundation for modern science a few centuries ago the first modern scientists they went out what is science essentially science is about observing patterns around us in the natural world and looking for the ways those patterns conform to laws and principles and the reason scientists bravely went out looking for laws of nature was because they believed there was a lawgiver that there was a creator who had made an ordered creation now at this point you might be thinking but why would I believe this it's just words in a book

I think if that's a concern for you it is worthwhile to spend some time looking at the views of Christian theists Christians who argue who work in the world of science and who assert that what we see around us and what they find in the scientific world corresponds with these claims just to mention a couple of things we might think firstly about the big bang and we can ask well why is there something rather than nothing there was a time when in the science world the idea of the universe having a beginning and a big bang was strongly resisted because people saw that that would imply there was a creator why is there something when at one stage there was nothing or we could look at the conditions needed for our universe to sustain itself and have the kind of conditions so that stars and planets could form it's sometimes called the fine tuning argument for the existence of God that the universe seems to be fine tuned with forces that if any of them were different by a smaller margin as one part in a million then the universe would not be able to sustain stars and planets and have a planet where we could have life if any one of the constants like the force of gravity or the strong nuclear force or the weak nuclear force was out by one part in a million the whole thing would either implode or expand so fast that we wouldn't have planets for life the thing is

Genesis doesn't seem to be concerned with these arguments or proofs why is that? it seems to be less concerned these early chapters they're less concerned with proving for us from other things whether or not there's a God and more concerned to tell us this is God speaking to us telling us he's there what is he like?

[14 : 01] you could think of it a bit like comparing fingerprints with a person so when the police are investigating a crime they might look for fingerprints at the scene and take fingerprints of people but ultimately what they're really concerned with is the identity of the criminal and we might look in other ways for God's fingerprints over our lives over the universe over the world but when we come to Genesis Genesis is offering us something very different to that it's saying come and meet your maker we actually get to know him so when we look at creation with the help of Genesis we stop looking at it so much just to see is there a God and we're more looking at it thinking what does this speak to me about God given what I'm told about him in the Bible as we look at creation just think about his wisdom and his care he's extraordinary to have made us to have made creation if you think about a human hair a typical human hair

I'm told is about 100,000 atoms wide in its width each one has 100,000 atoms and each one just in its width and within each one of those 100,000 atoms is a nucleus with neutrons and protons in it and electrons spin around that nucleus and each electron orbits its nucleus at 1,500 miles an hour just imagine something travelling at 1,500 miles an hour that's going on in every single atom and there are 100,000 of them in a hair's breadth and the nucleus itself rotates at 100,000,000,000,000 revolutions a second so as we look at creation we see there's a lot going on to make us who we are and the Bible is saying that the God of all this is sustaining that to make us who we are so if God is this careful designer forming and filling a good world and a good universe then who am I?

Who am I? Who are you? Let me just mention a couple of implications of hearing that there is a God of ordered creation first it means that you and I have value all around us people live as though human beings are very valuable but unless we were made by a God why?

where does that value come from? where does this idea come from that we have rights humans have rights that should be protected and defended it's really difficult to establish to ground human rights without believing Genesis chapter 1 that there is a God of all this who made us and has given us value we had an example of this last week we've been praying tonight haven't we about Afghanistan lots of us distressed about what's happened there there was this terrible scramble in Afghanistan to get people out we all saw that didn't we over the last couple of weeks in the news and I don't know if you saw this but in the midst of it with literally thousands of people left behind Penn Farthing managed to get an airlift of dogs and cats out of Kabul to bring them to safety to look after these dogs and cats and I was reading in the Guardian Gabby Hinsliff kicking off about that basically as a commentator she was just saying what kind of a message does that leave the world about what we value in the United Kingdom that we would say to Afghan interpreters we don't have room for your five year old son but we've just used a load of troops to ensure the safe transit of 200 dogs you see the premise behind her argument was people matter more than dogs here's the problem why are human beings any more valuable than dogs or cats or trees or stones if it's all just matter in motion it's very hard to see that

Genesis chapter 1 says we are valuable because we were planned for we were designed we have value as human beings the people of Afghanistan have value and we do as well related to that let's just think about purpose if we were designed if God planned for us and made us then we have a purpose I've got a couple of relatives Jill and Ian they're actually my in-laws I don't know why I've said it like that I just didn't want you to think this was an in-law joke or something just that in my in-laws house okay there are so many gadgets in the kitchen that we sometimes play a game guess what the gadget's for where we just find stuff and we go what on earth is that what could you do with it and we have to try and work it out so the thing is before you can evaluate is this gadget any good you have to know what it's for you can't condemn a gadget before you because you have to what's its purpose to then think is it good at what it was made for it is the same with us as people and I think this makes an extraordinary difference you see if we were accidental byproducts of chemical forces and genetic replication then what are we for we're not for anything as human beings life has no purpose it has no meaning and you can't look at any of our lives or anyone else's life and say it was any better or worse lived than the way anyone else lived their life not in any real sense because eventually we'll all just die out and the universe will just carry on and the universe doesn't care how we live how we live makes no difference in the bigger picture

[20 : 16] Genesis chapter one on the other hand speaks into our longing for purpose for our lives and meaning for our lives because it says the living God designed you and so we can turn to him to find out what our lives are for what we were made for with him in our lives our lives can have purpose and meaning as well as value so that's our first point it's what God tells us about himself and creation God is the God of ordered creation but what else does this early chapter this beginning chapter show us about God our second point is he's the God of personal connection let's just read again from verse one in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth now the earth was formless and empty darkness was over the surface of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters and God said let there be light and there was light so if this is what happened in the beginning what was there before the beginning if you like logically before this one God the creator but speaking and speaking with creative power as we see but also speaking in relationship with others

God the spirit is there distinct from God and in verse 26 we hear that God said let us make mankind in our image in our likeness so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground and as the bible unfolds and reveals more to us about God who God is we learn that there is one God but three persons in the one God father son and spirit and that's beyond our understanding but what we can see it does mean is that intrinsic to God is relationship if God was one person then we couldn't say that he is love in any meaningful sense until he's created something and then he would need that thing to love unless he's just a God of self love a sort of narcissistic God but the bible reveals to us that God is love because right in eternity before anything is made within God there is other person centered loving relationship so that as

God makes mankind part of our purpose part of what we're for part of what gives life meaning is us being drawn into that relationship to know God and we know in our own lives don't we that relationship is fundamental to who we are I had a friend Kate who died a few years ago and she wrote this book Late Fragments about what it was like to die in her 30s and she talked in that book about how it had struck her how much of life is about relationship with other people we know that and what we're seeing here is that our creator God made us to know him and to be known by him and as we move on through the bible we hear that this creator God has shown up in human history so that we can know him as the followers of Jesus were with him one night on the sea of Galilee and a storm came up it was whipped up and even the fishermen were terrified and Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat on a cushion and they woke him up and said teacher don't you care if we drown and Jesus woke and he stood up and he spoke and immediately it became calm and then

Jesus rebukes his followers because he says that instead of being afraid they should have trusted him what's going on in human history we see a man doing things that only God could do so that when we say how do I know if this is true that there's a God one answer we could give is if you'd been around 2,000 years ago in the Middle East you might have met him literally met him as John one of his closest followers said in our other reading he said we have seen his glory the glory is like the brilliance of God we've seen the brilliance of God we've seen his glory the glory of the one and only son who came from the father full of grace and truth so folks prepare to meet your maker not just from what he made not even just from his word about his works but also because he became a man so that we could know him and be known by him at the same time hearing that God is a God of personal relationship is something that we'd be right also to feel very troubled by

I remember a friend saying to me one day what do you think is the most outrageous verse in the whole Bible I don't know how much you know of the Bible and how you'd answer that he said to me what do you think is the most objectionable verse in the whole Bible and his answer was it's Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 isn't it in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth why well let's think again about that question who am I without this claim you and I are autonomous completely autonomous we don't have any value we don't have any purpose but you might think well there's something quite liberating about knowing the universe does not care how I live and I can live however I please I can make up my own mind what's right and wrong and I can try and become whoever I want to be but with this verse we are accountable there is a creator who has ownership rights over us he's allowed to make the rules for his world because he made it and so the

[26 : 39] Bible warns us that our hearts are turned away from that claim in fact our desire for personal autonomy from God is so important to us we look for reasons to deny this and the Bible's word for that desire to be independent from God is the word sin and it says that sin is such a big problem we can't even see it we think it's just normal but all the while we're blinded to the evidence around us and within us that God is there because we don't want him to be there but God says that when we come to him for help he can open our eyes so that's our third point that he's the God of order creation he's the God of personal connection thirdly he's the God of light in the darkness Jesus didn't just come into the world to pay us a visit he came because without him we are in the dark about God and we see a glimpse of that work here at the very start of the

Bible that third verse again there was darkness and then in verse three God said let there be light and there was light God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness where there's darkness God can just speak and there is light light is made and there's a verse about Jesus in the New Testament it's in 2nd Corinthians 4 it says that without God's help we can't know God but when we take a look at Jesus God promises that when we hear the message about Jesus from the Bible he who created light in the darkness he can enlighten our hearts he can enlighten our eyes so that we can see truth and enlighten our hearts God can shine his light into us so that we can see the glory of God in the face of

Jesus so folks prepare to meet your maker in the coming weeks as we continue in Genesis we've got this great chance to do that together in recent times I have offered to a few friends where I've been brave enough I've said to a few friends would you like to open the Bible with me would you like to just look at one of the Bible books about Jesus with me and a couple of them have said they would and we've done that together but a couple of them have said they didn't want to do that and they both said the same thing to me they said thanks for the offer but it's just not for me well whatever you've thought about God before tonight Genesis 1 says to us if you are in any way part of the heavens and the earth then this has everything to do with you doesn't it we've heard that there is a God of order creation who is our only hope for real value and purpose in life that he's a

God of personal connection who made us to know him and be known by him and even if we might feel in the dark about him tonight he is the God who can shine light into that darkness and he invites us through Jesus to know him and know him forever amen I'm going to hand back to we're going to sing we're going to sing in response to God's word the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it father God thank you that you made this world thank you that you are the one who is in control and the one who is before everything else thank you that you are both a powerful God who is creator but also a God that is with us intimately faithful always help us to know you through the Lord Jesus and help us to always be able to praise you for all the good things that you have given to us and your great and generous nature help us to know you better and to live lives that reflect your glory

Amen