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The Song of Creation

Genesis 1:1 – 31

Albert Einstein, arguably one of the most brilliant minds of the twentieth century, believed that the universe was eternal, static and unchanging. But his mathematical calculations were leading him in another direction – the universe was not eternal, rather it had a beginning. And he didn't like it. His philosophical foundation was being corrupted by his mathematical discoveries. He wanted the universe to be self-existent – not reliant on any outside cause. But his calculations persistently showed that the universe appeared to be one giant effect from one single cause. His theory of General Relativity, which has now been proven accurate, had revealed that there was a definite beginning to all time, matter and space. And it irritated him.

In fact he was so irritated with his own findings that he introduced a fudge factor, something he called a cosmological constant, so that his scientific calculations would validate his philosophical beliefs. It led him to do something that every child who does math learns very early not to do – he divided by zero – just so he could make the equation say what he wanted it to say. But that didn't last long. In 1919, Arthur Eddington conducted an experiment during a solar eclipse that empirically proved the theory of Relativity – the universe is not eternal and static – it had a definite beginning. But **Eddington**, like Einstein, was not pleased with his findings. He later wrote **"Philosophically, the notion of a beginning of the present order of nature is repugnant to me...I should like to find a genuine loophole"**. Since then, many other experiments and discoveries have validated and confirmed the theory, including the discovery by Robert Hubble in 1927 that the universe is expanding away from a single point in the distant past.

And we come to that point today in Genesis 1: **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** The debate around this statement, around the question of origins and where creation and humanity came from is a topic of hot debate and passion. Much of the passion that surrounds this question is because **the answer has implications** for everything else. For example, Genesis clearly says that there is a God who stands outside of time and space which means that He is **eternal** while we are **finite**. Genesis says that there was a **beginning** to history, which means there will be an **end**. Genesis says that **creation comes from God**, which means **creation belongs to God**. Genesis says that **people come from God**, which means that we are **accountable to God**.

This morning we're not going to argue over the authorship of Genesis. We'll just assume that the Bible is correct when it says that Moses was the author of Genesis and the next four books. And Moses wasn't writing Genesis to prove any theory of how: whether it was six literal days of creation or the six days represent vast eons of time; or whether or not evolution had some role in creation. Moses was writing this book in particular because Israel had just come out of 430 years of slavery in a strange land with strange customs and strange gods and strange beliefs and they didn't really know the God who had sent Moses to deliver them.

In many respects, Israel reflected the values and the customs of their slave masters. And Exodus 12 tells us that when they left Egypt, **"...a mixed multitude also went up with them..."**. In other words, this was not a homogenous group of people with one set of values and customs and beliefs. There is a lot of evidence that many who came out of Egypt at that time, came out with the images and fetishes and shrines of the gods of Egypt they had worshiped there. Even by the time Joshua was leading Israel, at one point he had to command the people to **"...put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the Lord."** So in order to teach this mixed crowd about the God who is greater than the gods of Egypt, Moses embarks on a writing project, and he begins with God: **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."**

We need to stress that **Genesis 1** was not written as a scientific textbook. We shouldn't read this as a scientific prescription on how things were created. Genesis doesn't tell that. It doesn't intend to. That doesn't mean that it doesn't contain any good science – it does, but it was not written to teach us science. Genesis was written to reveal the God of creation and answer the question of how and why He created the world and everything in it – which means it emphasizes God, not creation. You are not the center here, God is. The Bible in general, and the opening pages of Genesis in particular, are far more concerned with the questions of who and why than in proving some scientific theory of how. **Galileo** once said, **'The Holy Spirit intended to teach us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go'**.

A lot of people spend a lot of energy trying to make Genesis 1 into a scientific treatise on how God created the heavens and the earth. But I would urge you today to resist that temptation. The beginning of Genesis is not a science book on creation, it is more like **the song of creation**. Look at chapter 1. Look at the poetry. Look at how the repetition of thoughts flows in this account. 'Evening and morning, evening and morning...it was so, it was so, it was so,...God saw that it was good, God saw that it was good, behold it was very good' Scientific textbooks don't do that, essays don't do that, narrative doesn't do that – but songs do. Songs are lyrical and repetitive and poetic. And in songs you don't push the details.

Genesis 1 is very much like what we hear when we read Judges 4 and 5. In Judges four we have an account of the victory by Israel over Sisera and then in chapter five we have the Song of Deborah, describing the same event in a song. And in chapter five we see a lyrical, poetic version of the narrative facts in chapter 4. And Deborah uses metaphorical language to describe the facts of the events. At one point she says the stars came and fought against Sisera – '**from their courses they fought against Sisera**'. Did she mean that he got nailed by meteors? Of course not. What you have in Judges 4 and 5 is a narrative about an historical event and then a song about that event, describing the significance of the event. Genesis 1 is the song of creation, it is singing the glory of God and creation. And songs are meant to convey the wonder and the majesty of whatever they are singing about – not scientific facts. Are there scientific facts in Genesis 1? Absolutely! Just the notion that everything began at a single point in the distant past was fact enough to rearrange the world of Albert Einstein; and make Eddington wish for loopholes.

But we are not mining Genesis 1 for facts. We're learning the song of creation. And what it sings to us is **who God is**, how He created everything and why He created all that we see and all that we don't yet see. First of all it says God began everything. **He is Creator**. And that tells us that God is outside time and space. Right away our attention is directed to this awesome being that stands above and apart from everything in the universe. This song points to God, not to us. It tells us something of who God is. It says that we are not a product of random chance – just a collocation of random molecules that happen to come together in unexplainable ways in a serendipitous pattern. It tells us that this God has purpose and reasoning behind all of creation.

And then we learn that He didn't just take some parts to make a whole. Genesis 1 says that God created – **bara** – the heavens and the earth. That word for create is unique to God. Only God can do this kind of creation. It is creation **ex nihilo** – something out of nothing. This word is only used in the Bible in conjunction with God's creative powers. We talk of creating things, but we take existing things and make other things. God starts with nothing and makes the universe. This explanation is totally different than either modern philosophy or ancient philosophies. **Modern philosophy** says that the world, the universe, nature, is a fortuitous **accident** and it is the only thing that is really there. The material world is the only reality – this **world is important** – it is all we have – consequently we must **live for now**.

But the **ancient philosophies**, and there are lots of them, say something different. All of the ancient mythologies and creation stories agree that the world was not created out of nothing. **Nature is not an accident**. In some of them, the gods and people and plants and animals emerge out of the earth. Others begin with a crab or a turtle or some other animal who dives into a primeval ocean and brings up something out of which the universe is made. Or the heavens and the earth are made out of the carcass of a sea monster, or the universe is made when a cosmic egg splits and a giant comes out and his limbs form the observable world. But the story is the same – this world is always derivative – it always comes from something. It's never created out of nothing. Only Genesis says different.

And these explanations all tend to agree that this material universe, this world, is not real, **it's not important** – this world is an illusion and you want to get beyond the material. The body is the prison house of the soul and **you need to escape** the prison house. In other words, the material world is bad – you have to get away from it. You see, modern philosophy says that the material world is all we have and so we must live for now, live for things, live for wealth, you live for pleasure – because that's all there is and then you die, this world is important. But on the other hand, the ancient philosophies say that this world isn't important at all, and you need to escape it. Which is why you never get scientific inquiry into the material world from these religions. You never get any concept of social justice, or a concern for the poor and oppressed, or even any idea that creation itself is valuable on its own terms. In all the years I've been going to Africa, I've never seen a Buddhist medical mission, or a Muslim community service project, or Hindu social workers.

You do get a kind of social conscience and activism from modern philosophy, but it is always self-serving. But Genesis 1 says that **God** created the heavens and the earth. It wasn't an accident, it's not all there is, so don't worship it, don't live for the material world. And on the other hand, God **created** the heavens and the earth. Which means the heavens and the earth are important. It's real and He created it good and therefore you fight injustice, you feed the hungry and you clothe the poor and you work to save babies from the abortionists. The material world is important. Genesis 1 stands against both of those philosophies because it says the world began by God and it began out of nothing, and God created something good.

On the one hand, the Christian doctrine of creation says that physical pleasure in the material world is good – God created the physical world good. And we recognize that, which is why we see the wrong in the world and fight against it. We don't say, 'Oh well, this world is passing away so we'll just let it go to hell in its own way'. Every other religion says that salvation is escaping earth to heaven. But Christians pray, '**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven**'. And in Revelation 21 we see the purpose of God fulfilled as the New Jerusalem is seen coming **down** out of heaven to the earth – a renewed earth to be sure – but heaven comes **down** to earth.

On the other hand, the Christian doctrine of creation says don't worship the material world. Don't let it be your god. God created it – it didn't just come into being on its own. And so Christians don't live for this world – the world was created for us. We don't live for comfort – we don't live for money – we don't live for food – we don't live for recreation – we don't live for sex. We don't think they're bad or wrong. We just don't live for them. So we have Genesis 1 coming in against both ideas – one that says all we have is the material world and the other that says the material world is an illusion. Genesis 1 says that God created the heavens and the earth and that His creation was good. Six times in this chapter God creates and the Bible says, 'And God saw that it was good'. And then when He finished with the creation of man God said His creation was very good. So we need to disabuse ourselves of the idea that material things are bad – and of the idea that we just live for the material.

Genesis also shows us **how God creates**. He doesn't wave a magic wand. He creates **by speaking**. He never creates without speaking. Eight times here He speaks things into existence. 'Let there be light' and there was light. 'Let the earth sprout vegetation' and the earth brought forth vegetation. 'Let there be lights in the heavens' and the sun and the moon came into being. The difference between God's speaking and my speaking is that when I say 'Let there be light' I have to go turn on the light switch. God simply says the word. God's word has agency, it has power, my word doesn't.

What we see in Genesis 1 is that we have a God who is eternal, all-powerful, who stands outside of time and space, a God who created everything and everything He created was good and meant for good. And He is a God who created everything by speaking. His word has power – has agency. Furthermore, when we look at other passages in the Bible, we understand that all things are also held up by His word of power. If He stopped speaking – everything would fall. Planets would careen out of orbit and smash into each other, suns would explode and destroy everything in their paths. We have a speaking God. Genesis 1 shows us something of who God is and how He created the heavens and the earth; so we naturally ask the question why? Why did God create the heavens and the earth? Was it because He was lonely, as some would say? Was it just an experiment that unfortunately went wrong? **Why** did God create the heavens and the earth?

If we look at verse 26 in Genesis 1, we get a clue as to why He created the heavens and the earth: '*Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness..."*' This is important. In the beginning God creates the heaven and the earth, but verse two says that: The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. What this doesn't say is that God created and then everything went bad. Formless and void and dark means that it was not yet inhabitable. Think barren desert – think howling wilderness. And so we go through the account of God making the earth habitable – creating the light, separating the waters and the dry land, creating plants and trees, the sun and the moon, the fish and animals in the sea and then all the beasts of the field – and then God said – Let Us make man in Our image.

So who is the Us here? God obviously had a council of more than one – and it wasn't with the angels – we're not made in their image. And the answer is Himself – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the Trinity. And you see them here in Genesis 1. In the beginning God, and then you have the Holy Spirit hovering, and then you have the Word creating.

In his gospel, John draws this out: *In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God – He was in the beginning with God...and the word became flesh and tabernacled among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father.* In other words you have the Son right there, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. And what you have is a community – right from the beginning, doing creation together and saying **Let us make man in our image.**

From all eternity God has been a community, a circle of fellowship and love between Father, Son and Spirit. And they are delighting in each other's being, praising each other's glory, enjoying each other's beauty, and sharing love between themselves – and one day they said, 'Let's expand the circle – let's widen the community – let's create beings who can become part of this community'. And they began to sing the song of creation. The why is about **bringing us into community.** You must see that all this speaking means that God is after relationship. Why does God make us into His image? So we can reflect His glory – image His community. Everything of His creation to some degree images God. Look at the sun and the moon – look at the language – they were created to govern, to rule over the day and the night. Look at nature – we speak of eco systems – plants and animals that exist together in dependent relationship – that shouts community. God created man in His image, male and female He created them – that's relationship, that's community. It's community that images God.

Psalm 19 says: *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.'* What does that mean? Psalm 19 says, Genesis 1 is saying – no rather it is singing – that God created in nature a whole community of beings, all of whom can reflect the glory and majesty of God. And then God comes to them and He says over and over, '**It is good – it is good – it is very good!**'. What does that mean? Does that mean that God creates everything and then puts the seal of Good Housekeeping on His creation? Is God just saying, 'Well that passes inspection'?

No. What God is saying, what Genesis 1 says over and over, is that God is creating and then standing back and saying, 'Oh, that's good, that's very good'. He's enjoying it. Father, Son and Spirit reveling in the goodness of creation. It's kind of like when you eat a really good meal and in the enjoyment and reflection of the food and the moment you say 'Oh that was very good'. God creates nature and a community of beings that can reflect the glory and majesty of God, who sing His praises, and then He completes the circle by saying, 'I have made you so beautiful and glorious and I love you. You are good, you are very good' – and He sings over us. **Zephaniah 3** says: '*The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty One who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.*' **He sings over us!**

Which explains why our senses sometimes are overwhelmed when we see majestic mountains, or a stunning sunset, or the great multitudes of wild nature on display in the Serengeti, or the thunder and lightening crashing on our ears during a storm. And we hear music. And it moves us. Why? Genesis 1 tells us why. It is creation singing the praises of its Maker. And it's calling you in. But you can't really get in. **C.S. Lewis** put it this way: *"We do not want merely to see beauty... we want something else which can hardly be put into words- to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it...At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see."* In other words, we can see the splendor but we can't get in. We see the majesty and the wonder and it hints at a beauty and love and perfection we can only yearn for.

Genesis 1 tells us creation is a choir. The heavens are telling the glory of God; the heavens are declaring His righteousness. The stars in their courses are declaring His greatness. Isaiah tells us that the beasts of the field glorify God, even the jackal and the ostrich. And they're saying '**Our Maker loves us, our Maker delights in us, our Maker says we're good**'. All of creation is singing to Him. And it moves us even though we really don't know why – we're drawn to it. There is an echo of that song in our souls that responds. Not too long ago, Louie Giglio put together one of the most remarkable displays of creation singing when he took recorded sounds of **pulsars** - neutron stars that emit beams of radiation that sweep through Earth's line of sight – and the songs whales sing to communicate. He put these sounds together in a mashup – which is another word for two or more songs or sounds blended together to make something new. And the result is spectacular. **(Video)**

The song of creation is telling the glories of God. It's singing His praises, and it's inviting you into the circle. And yet you can't join – you can't get in. Now Genesis 1 doesn't tell us how to get in. We have to wait until we get to Genesis 2 and 3, and we're going to get there. But let's take a quick look ahead anyway. Why do we sense the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure? Why do we want to be united with the splendors we see but we cannot mingle with them? Why do we hear the echo of beauty and perfection, and yet we can't get in? The answer is we can't sing the same song. Every human being has made a choice to be their own master, their own creator, and the Bible says that we don't want to join the circle on His terms.

And as a result we have two problems. When we hear the song of creation it delights us and it troubles us. It delights us because we hear the invitation to join the chorus. It troubles us because we know that we can't. We know that we have rejected our Creator. **George Whitfield** once said: *'Haven't you ever noticed that when you come near the animals they growl at us, they bark at us, the birds screech at us and fly away? Do you know why? They know that we have a quarrel with their master.'* **Tim Keller** put it this way: *Nature is praising God and being what God made it to be, by and large, but we're not: it's inviting us into a song that we can't sing. The reason nature is singing a song of praise is because it's under the benediction of God; it's singing that 'Our Maker loves us; our Maker says that we're good; He enjoys us, delights in us.'*

According to Genesis 1, every human being was created to know that – to feel that – to live under that kind of approval. You need to know, everyone needs to know this in the very marrow of his soul, that your Creator looks at you and says to you, 'You are good – I love you!'. **You need that divine approval** more than your necessary food. Studies of those who never got the approval they needed from their father or mother or some other important figure in their lives, reveal lives that are inevitably troubled and tragic. How much more do we need the approval of the One who made us? To hear Him say, 'You are good, I love you, you have no flaws, I see nothing bad in you'. You need to hear your Creator rejoicing over you – you need to hear Him singing over you with joy!

And yet you know that you're not right with Him. You know that you've rejected Him, you know you've tried to be your own master and lord. You have a quarrel with your Maker. So what are we going to do? Genesis 1 points to the answer. Remember how God created everything by speaking, by His word? John chapter one tells us that this word that was God and in the beginning with God became a man. The Creator entered into creation. Jesus left His throne above, became a man and lived with us. And one day He went to the cross. And on the cross you see the exact opposite of Genesis 1. On the cross Jesus spoke, and there was no answer – **My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** The Spirit of God was not hovering over Him. He was made without form and void. He was emptied. The very opposite of creation happened to Jesus on the cross. Why? Our Maker had to be unmade so that we could be remade. The once perfect creation had to be uncreated so that we could be a new creation in Christ.

And **when you believe that Jesus** came and lived the life you should have lived and died the death that you should have died – when that becomes a reality in your life – then you know that God sings over you again. You know that He loves you and through Christ's death on the cross He sees you beautiful, He sees you perfected, Your Creator approves of you, He rejoices over you, He delights in you! You need to hear that so badly, that until the Spirit of God brings that into your heart, your life is without form and void, your life has a huge hole at the center that nothing will fill but the song of your Creator.

Unless you believe that God loves you and sent His Son to die for you, you'll try to fill that void with material things, or you'll try to be really good and really holy and stifle your sinful impulses by sheer will-power. But what you need to deal with that void is to see that Jesus Christ was made void for you. You need to hear the voice of Your Creator saying, 'You are good'. And until you hear that, you can't join the rest of creation, and you can't join the song and you can't get into that eternal circle of community and love. Won't you start singing that song this morning? Won't you accept God's gracious invitation to join His community?

Our gracious God and Father,

Creator of heaven and earth, Word made flesh, Jesus, Son of God, Holy Spirit who hovered over the waters, the heavens declare Your glory, the earth sings of Your riches, the universe is Your temple and all of creation tells of Your goodness. You have made us what we are and given us what we have; in You we live and move and have our being. We hear Your speaking and long to join that eternal community of love and affection revealed to us in Christ. Holy Spirit of God, take this word and open it into our hearts and minds so that we can hear the song of creation and join in that song to our God. Grant us to know that in Christ we are accepted, in Christ we are drawn into the divine community; in Christ we can hear our Creator sing over us, 'You are good and I love you! Come, join in the song!', we pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.