

The Lord, Our Maker
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Psalm 95:6 says, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” For the next 6 weeks, we are going to spend our time on Sunday mornings thinking about, celebrating, and being challenged by the reality that our God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit - is the Creator of all there is. Probably the main reason why I want to preach on God as Creator and us as his creation is because this truth is foundational to our Christian faith. From Genesis to Revelation, throughout the entire corpus of Scripture, this truth is celebrated, taught, and restated over and over again. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Doctrine of Creation is a foundational pillar of our faith. Or put another way: our faith and trust in our God would radically change if God were not the Creator of all there is; in fact, why would we believe in him at all? Think of it: the one we are worshiping, the one we honor, isn't actually the One that brought this world into existence; something or someone else did. And if that is the case, why aren't we worshiping that one? Certainly, the one or the thing that is the source of this created world is worthy of worship. It's hard to overstate just how important our trust in the Lord *as our Maker* is to our faith.

We live in interesting times. On the one hand with the advances of scientific methods and instrumentation, we are able to study God's world with incredible precision and learn amazing new details on a daily basis. From the depths of the sea to the outer rims of space. We are continually blown away by creation when we see it. The Wipfs watch Netflix; a lot of you do, too. Have you noticed all the nature documentaries on Netflix? And why not? What can compete with the beauty and drama of nature! It's so captivating.

I remember being blown away by God's design a few years ago when one of my sons was preparing for a somewhat minor surgical procedure. Basically, his digestive track was a little out of place and contributed to reflux - we were going to go in and fix that. I remember asking the young surgeon why my boy had this problem in the first place. And for the next 5 minutes or so, the doctor went into the details of the fetal development of our digestive system. I listened amazed as he explained how it all worked together at the very early stages of life. He said there's a time when an unborn baby can't house the development of the stomach and intestines so this system along with its organs are developed outside of a baby's body. But at the right time the body starts drawing in these organs to house them inside our abdominal cavity. But the body doesn't just draw them in any old way. Instead it folds the organs in a particular way so that everything sits just right to produce a healthy digestive tract that most of us enjoy today. Somehow, he said, that folding in didn't happen quite the way it's supposed to so with a few little snips here and there, everything should be pretty close to normal. I remember listening to him talk and getting wrapped up in the wonder of it all. I thought, “How amazing is it that God would create and providentially order even the details of how our guts are formed and placed in our bodies so that we can enjoy the comfort and function of a healthy digestive

system?" Mercifully, today God is giving us us a more detailed glimpse into his creation that should produce the kind of worship and honor in you and me that our great God deserves.

Yet, on the other hand, the belief and confidence of God as Creator is being questioned more and more as well. As more people uncritically accept Naturalism (the belief that everything arises from purely natural processes and properties) the need for a supernatural Creator is considered unnecessary and even foolish and silly. And if the world did not need a Creator, if the world did not need God to come into existence, then surely you and I don't need a Creator or a God to help us on a daily basis, either. That's how it works and how it impacts the way we think and what we believe.

So, establishing the truth, the reality that God created the heavens and the earth (that's the Bible's way of saying *all there is*) is of utmost importance and will be our first order of business. We find truth in the pages of scripture; that's where we are going to spend most of our time together this morning.

So, let's start at the beginning with Genesis 1 (READ Gen. 1:1-5). It's worth reading the entire first chapter of Genesis; we won't do that today, but I'd encourage you to find time to do that, especially if you've never read Genesis. Let's make some observations from these first 5 verses.

The first observation is that there was a beginning. Do you see that in vs. 1? *In the beginning*. In the beginning of what? Well, in the beginning of everything. I love the simplicity of that first phrase. Before anything was created. So, get this: the universe had a beginning. There was a time when all that we currently observe with our 5 senses, all that we can see with massive telescopes and powerful microscopes, and all that exists even in the spiritual world did not exist. There was a beginning. Before that beginning (can we say *before*) there was nothing; after that beginning there was something.

There's actually some debate about this in the scientific and philosophical communities. Was there *really* a beginning or has the universe always been since eternity past? I won't bore you with some of the philosophical responses to this, but let me just say that there are a host of problems thinking there wasn't a beginning. And I don't want to come across paranoid, but it seems a lot of those discussions have this anti-God, anti-supernatural bias; almost like the goal of the discussion is to eradicate the possibility of a supernatural explanation for the existence of the universe. If the universe has always been, there's no need for a God to create it. Of course, that's making your conclusion before you have the evidence. And the evidence in the scriptures is clear: there was a beginning.

Secondly, God created the heavens and the earth. As I said before, that phrase, *the heavens and the earth*, was a way the scripture writers referred to everything there is. You and I need to remember, while the scripture writer of Genesis, who we believe to be the prophet Moses, was inspired by God in his writing - that means, what he wrote was as if God was writing

it - he was still a man living in 1400 BC. That means he didn't have or know any modern, scientific notions we take for granted today. He didn't know about DNA or electrons or anything else we've discovered, say, through modern science. So he spoke these glorious and all-encompassing truths in his own cultural language with his understanding, not in ours. I'm guessing here, but if God would have inspired a modern writer to pen Genesis 1 maybe vs. 1 would say, "In the beginning, God created every molecule, every atom, every string of energy in the entire universe."

And who did that? God did. God created the heavens and the earth. That's pretty black and white. And as I've mentioned in the beginning of this sermon, that truth is repeated throughout the entire Bible. The existence of our universe is due to the God of the Bible. This is probably the most important thing to see and celebrate from this first sermon: this world, our world, and all that is in it, was made and created by God - by *our* God. We'll talk more about this in a minute, but let me show you a little more from Genesis 1.

The next important observation to see is *how* God made the world. Now, this is where things can get a little tricky or confusing because there are different ways of understanding this question. There are theological ways of asking and answering this question and there are scientific ways of asking and answering this question. Those aren't the same questions and won't have the same answers.

Let me give you an example of what I mean by this: let me show you Psalm 29:9 on the screen, "The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'" Look how the scripture writer attributes the birth, the creation, of a deer to the voice of the Lord. That's exactly how the creation of our world happened according to Genesis 1:3, 6 and many more verses in this first chapter. Look at vs. 3, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." God spoke and light was created. That's exactly how Ps. 29 says a fawn is born. God spoke and the deer gives birth. But, just think about this for a minute. We all know how (scientifically) a fawn is born. We've seen bucks during the rut; we don't need to review the birds and the bees when it comes to this. Deers don't give birth by a voice; they give birth by the natural and scientific processes outlined in any good HS biology textbook. So, what does this mean? I think it means that while we can see and study and observe scientifically the intricacies of such things about creation (like a deer giving birth), underneath it all is the sustaining, creating, and providential power of God's creative work. Can you see that there are more several *how* answers? There is *how ultimately* did the earth come into being and then there is *how specifically* did the earth come into existence as we know it today? What we see with our eyes are these natural processes whereby a deer gives birth to her fawn. And that can be studied and observed. We can use that information for scientific purposes. But, by faith, we know that the final, ultimate cause of any deer giving birth is the creative work of God.

I think when the scriptures talk about the creation of the heavens and the earth, it's primarily focusing on and celebrating the theological truth of God's creative power very similarly to what I just illustrated from Psalm 29. I don't think the big idea (if I can use the Ps. 29 example

again) is learning the natural processes by which a deer is born, or how stars are created, or how fish filled the oceans, but instead the big idea is the theological truth that nothing in all creation comes about apart from the creative work of God.

We see in other passages of scripture that the creation of the world is ultimately attributed to the voice or words of God. Go to the NT book of Hebrews 11; look at vs. 3 (READ). That's just like Genesis 1, isn't it? In fact, I would argue that the Hebrew writer got that from Genesis 1; he didn't make that up, he read it in his scriptures. So, this scripture writer, inspired by God, echoes and affirms what another scripture writer already said. That the creation of the world is the result of the creative power of God found in his words.

Let's get a little more practical and talk about the ongoing debate concerning Creation and Evolution? I think we can find a way where we firmly hold to what we have learned this morning with strong convictions, but also provide space for us to grapple with what isn't always so clear. Let me suggest this framework to guide your thinking. I break this conversation into 4 categories:

- Creation vs. Evolution
- creation vs. evolution

This first set, with capital letters, concerns the debate about the ultimate explanation for all there is. Some people believe that the ultimate explanation for the universe is the creation of the heavens and the earth by God. He's the ultimate reason. Others believe the ultimate explanation for the universe is Evolution, random changes and mutations through purely natural causes. Now, based on what we've seen in the scriptures, there's just one option to accept, right? The Bible says plainly: the world didn't accidentally come into existence. It was made by God's creative, supernatural power. This is, by far, the most important thing for us to hold, to believe, and to pass on to our children about this topic. We can not be faithful students of the Bible, faithful followers of Jesus and think that the world popped into existence by itself by accident. We are capital "C" Creationists and we must reject capital "E" Evolution.

But there is also a lower case creation vs. evolution debate. In the lower case, the question isn't a matter of ultimate explanation, but instead the processes, or the mechanisms by which the world was created. It's just like what we talked about early with the deer from Psalm 29. The voice, the creative power, and wisdom of God is the ultimate cause of the birth of a deer (and the birth of everything else in all creation), but the mechanism God uses to bring about the life of a deer involves DNA, genetic codes, bodily organs, and even the cycles of nature. You can study those with microscopes and other scientific instrumentation. You can connect some of those dots. And as our scientific ability and tools keeps expanding, we'll be able to study these processes even more.

I'm simplifying and generalizing things some, but look at this continuum with little "c" creation on the one side and little "e" evolution on the other. This continuum doesn't represent the ultimate explanation for the existence of creation, but how it got accomplished. Did it get

accomplished in the most literal way you could read Genesis 1 where creation spontaneously popped into existence just like we see and observe it today, or did it come into existence through some evolutionary processes? Or is it some of both? And how much? Let me remind you, this isn't a question of how much God was involved in the creation of the world (a whole bunch on this side and just a little on that side); no, God was involved with all of it; he's the source of everything. Just how did he do it? That's the question.

I would want to persuade you, my good brothers and sisters, that there is room for Christians to disagree on some these points; on little "c" creation and little "e" evolution. We will have some disagreements because we may not quite interpret scripture the same. We also may have some disagreements because we are persuaded differently by the scientific evidence. I don't believe it's of critical value that we all agree about these matters, but we must agree with about the ultimate explanation of the universe - that our Great God is the Creator of all there is.

Some of the ground we are going to cover in this series includes what does it mean to our faith that God is the Creator? What are our responsibilities to God as his creatures? But we can only answer those questions when we've got the first one down; that the Lord is our Maker. He made it all. I hope you saw that clearly in the text of scripture this morning and I'm also hoping some of our discussion helps you navigate the challenging, yet hopeful, times for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Key verse: Genesis 1:1

Questions for the week

- What questions perplex you concerning the creation of the universe? Share them with someone.
- Are you convinced that God created the universe? What is keeping you from believing that?
- What was the most helpful/challenging word you heard in the sermon this morning?