

This is My Father's World

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[0 : 00] It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom. It was the age of foolishness. It was the epoch of belief. It was the epoch of incredulity. It was the season of light. It was the season of darkness. It was the spring of hope. It was the winter of despair. Where do those lines come from? The Tale of Two Cities. Right on. Well done. The Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens. And it's a genius opening way to begin because it plunges you straight into the view of the world, the way, the sense of being that the author wants you to inhabit as you read this book, as the plot carries you along.

That's the power of a great opening line. And that is what these opening lines in the book of Genesis, the opening lines of the Bible, the beginning, they're here to do that for us. Through their power and beauty, these words give us eyes to see. God, our world, ourselves. In short, it gives us the beginnings of a worldview. And the more I read that chapter that we just read together, the more I'm convinced that there is no more powerful or beautiful or sublime beginning of anything. There's no better place to begin than this. It is a brilliant beginning. It serves as an introduction, doesn't it, to everything. This is reality, it says. This is what you need to know to understand the rest of the story, where it's all going, to see the world rightly, to understand your place in the world, to understand and see and get the story of your life in it. And it is so, so good. I'm sure you're counting how many times you've read those words. It is good, good beyond whatever kind of world that we could make up or imagine for ourselves any work of fiction. Because Genesis tells us this, this world. It is my, our Father's world. It is God's world. Now, perhaps you're expecting us to begin this evening with a different Charles, not Charles Dickens, so much as Charles Darwin. Whether you've read the first chapter of Genesis a thousand times, or this is your first time of hearing it, probably the chain reaction in everyone's head went something like this. God, creation, science, evolution, age of the earth. Okay, how does that all fit? How does it all work together? And that is a good question.

[3 : 10] Let's just rewind a little bit and ask, is that the question that this book was written to answer? Okay, to point out the obvious, Moses had not read The Origin of Species. He had not watched planet earth before he wrote Genesis. And so the purpose of this book cannot be to tell us about those things. Now, Genesis does have things to say about science and about the study of our world, which we'll pick up as we go through. I'm happy to try to answer any questions you might have after the service or point you in the direction of scientists who have studied these things. But if we read Genesis, and this chapter of Genesis is as if it were a how to build a world manual, here a scientific textbook, or even a really good bit of poetry, then we're not going to see what's going on here. Because we'll be looking for what we want to find out, rather than what Genesis wants to tell us. In short, to put it more simply, there's a danger before we even get started that we're just asking the wrong questions. So what sort of questions should we be asking of this book? Well, the question is, isn't it, what was the book written to tell us? And the best way I can think to put it is this. Okay, there's no shortage, is there, of superhero movies out there? Is there, there's been a proliferation the last 10 or 15 years? Avengers, Justice League, my personal favourite is Batman, Dark Knight trilogy, doesn't get better than that. And there's always this mystery, isn't there, with superheroes, as to their identity. Who is this rescuer? You know, the classic moment in the film where

Batman or whoever turns around, he's done the rescue, turns back to disappear into the night, and the rescued person says, wait, tell me your name. Who are ye? We want to know, don't we, the identity, the backstory. Where did this great hero come from? Who is it who has rescued us? That is the question that this book was written to answer. It was written for rescued people to know the identity of the one who had rescued them. How do we get there? Well, I take it from Jesus that

Genesis was written by Moses, which means that when Moses wrote it, the Exodus, the great big rescue, had happened. Okay, they were slaves, weren't they? God sent plagues, they get past Pharaoh, they escape through the sea. And so as the ink is drying on the page, page one of the Bible, God's people stand in the desert on the other side of the sea, still breathless from having been gloriously rescued out of slavery and darkness. And the question they ask as they stand out of breath in the presence of the glorious God who has saved them is, tell me who you are. Who are ye? And so Moses writes this God-given, inspired origin story, if you like, for them to know who God truly is, for them to see who it is who has brought them out into freedom. In short, this book is written to tell us, God's people, how we got here and who it is who got us here. And so if we are alive on earth today, as I trust you are, if you're sitting in this building, whoever we are, this book helps us to see who we are and whose we are, what kind of world we live in and who rules over this world.

And if we are rescued and redeemed by God, if our trust is in him this evening, then this book is his gift to us to tell us where our story began and to tell us who it is who has saved us. In short, that our redeemer is in fact our creator. Genesis is a book of beginnings.

You're going to see that as we go on. But tonight we start with the beginning, the big beginning. And we see the first thing that ever begins is God's temple cosmos. Now I compared Genesis just now with a superhero origin story. But there's one big glaring difference, isn't there? Glance down at verse one with me. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. What is it that begins in that verse? Well, not our hero, not our God. This is the beginning, but it's not God's beginning, is it? It's the beginning of everything else, the heavens and the earth, which is a classic way of saying in Hebrew, this thing and that thing and everything in between. This is the beginning.

Time and space and matter and forces and quarks and galaxies and whatever exists in the material universe begins here. But not God. He is already there. He simply is. The Bible doesn't ever argue for the existence of God. And if we struggle with that, the idea of God not having a beginning or the idea of God existing at all, well, let me invite you just to step back and consider that every theory of the origin of life needs something to have always been there. Because you cannot get something out of nothing without someone being there to do it. Either God is eternal and he created all the stuff at a certain point of time, or all the stuff is eternal and no one created it. But you can't begin with nothing and no God and end up with a cosmos. It just doesn't work. And so the Bible claims reasonably then that out of nothing, God was there and created, brought into being all things. But that's only verse one, isn't it? God. And the whole rest of the passage is about what God did, God's creative work, and what sort of cosmos it is that he has created. So what's going on then, these six days of creation?

[10:03] Well, for us to get a handle on it, it really helps to know what isn't going on. Because Genesis, it wasn't the only account of creation in the ancient world. Genesis wasn't written to counter Charles Darwin or something like that. It was written to counter alternative origins of the cosmos. Other nations had other stories. But Genesis has a completely unique account of the beginning. And the origin stories of the ancient world, well, they're not easy reading. They describe it a dark and chaotic world.

Bad-tempered gods battling together for control, heaping the corpses of divine beings on top of one another to create hills and mountains. Your classic children's fairy tales. If you want some light bedtime reading or to follow up on this, there are different accounts that we have available.

Numerilish from Mesopotamia, or Gilgamesh from Akkadia, or Athrahasis from Sumeria. But what is common to all these ancient myths is the idea that the world is an accident. It's fallout from cosmic warfare. The universe is basically out of control, and the powers ruling over it are not stable or predictable or good or trustworthy. Now, how would you feel knowing that the world is that that that was the world that you lived in? Constantly terrified? Completely uncertain of the future? Living under a shadow of fear without value, without purpose, without direction? And then into that world comes the book of Genesis. And it is like nothing that the world up to that point had ever dreamed of or heard about. It starts in much the same way. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep.

The shapeless and dark and empty, watery chaos. But over those stormy, dark depths hovers the Spirit of God. And then God speaks. And it is not a blood-curdling battle cry from heaven, but a simple command.

Let there be. Let there be light. In Hebrew, it's just two words. And with those two words, the darkness is gone. And light floods the cosmos. And then what? Do the light and darkness battle for supremacy and control? No, God simply separates the light from the darkness.

[13:03] And it's so. He gives them names. He sees that it's good. And that's it. It's really boring, isn't it? But what would this tell you if you lived in the ancient world? What would it assure you of?

You do not need to be afraid. Don't be afraid. This is the God that brought everything into being. And this is the world that you live in. Who is this God? Well, the starters, there is only one of him. And he single-handedly brings everything into being with a word. He has no rival, no competition. He has no wars to fight, no battles to win. What's more, he is committed enough to his creation to go about it with intention and design and deliberation. You see, the things that he creates are overwhelmingly good.

Everything he brings into being reflects back at him, his own desperately good character. See, no one needs to help him. No one needs to oppose him. He's utterly sovereign and in control. He's completely benevolent and kind and good to everything that he has made. Friends, with this chapter of the Bible, we can be quick to kind of zone in on the details and miss the blindingly obvious.

[14:32] Because our view of God has been shaped over centuries by these scriptures. Some of us have never known a God other than this God. But in a world overshadowed by fear and deception and confusion, the news of this one God who is supreme and sublime, the God of order and control, of goodness and power and wisdom and truth.

He was and is himself the good news that the world needed and needs to hear. It's totally world-changing to know that this is the God who rules the cosmos and not a thousand warring idols. What would knowing this God do for your life in this world? Well, it does for our hearts. It does for us what God did for the earth.

Paul writes, For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Light to banish darkness and chase away fear. That is what this chapter is designed and written to do. To strip away all sorts of things that the people of God had been taught to fear and serve and worship in captivity and to replace those things with a blinding vision of their creator God.

[16:13] And a great put-down. Let me show you this in the text. It's a great put-down of those gods, false gods, the sun and moon and sea creatures.

They don't even get the dignity of having names. God names so many things, doesn't he? But just glance down at verse 16. God made two great lights.

The greater light to govern the day. The lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. Clarity is speaking about the sun and moon.

But in Genesis, simply a big light and a little light. And as an afterthought, you know, the galaxies created by a good God.

These things not to be served in fear, but to serve God and serve humanity, his servants, his creatures. Or have a look at verse 21.

[17:11] So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing that the water teems with. Those dragons, sea monsters, they are nothing more than God's pets that he fills the sea with.

And he is their king. Knowing that these things, then, are the work of this good God, what would there have been to fear? In the earth below, in the heavens above, what power is there beside this great and glorious creator to cause us fear and anxiety and terror?

It was a deep tragedy, brothers and sisters, that this chapter is so often seen as a problem to be solved. No, it is brilliant news.

Brilliant news that we, in our fear, in our world, and its chaos and confusion, so desperately need to hear. Our society believes, does it not, that it has outgrown these ideas.

It's gotten beyond creation. It's grown out of Genesis. It's grown out of God. But in reality, at heart, it has simply turned back to the darkness that reigned before we knew the truth.

[18:33] A world full of unpredictability and uncertainty and chaos, ruled not by a good and holy God, but by blind and indifferent chance.

Friends, let me remind you, that is not a new idea. It is an old, old worldview. And the result is the same as it has ever been. Rates of anxiety spiraling out of control.

People who live in fear. You're quite apart from whether chance could bring about a world such as this, or tell us where we really came from.

Why would we want that to be true? Why is that the story that we would tell ourselves and our children? This well-known quote from the atheist writer Richard Dawkins sums up, in chilling but honest words, that ancient and modern alternative to the book of Genesis.

He writes, Some people are going to get hurt.

[19 : 44] Some people are going to get hurt. Other people are going to get lucky. And you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. 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. How would you feel knowing that you lived in a world like that? Friends, it is that chaotic, purposeless, valueless, pitiless indifference, and the sheer terror of living in a world like that, that this chapter of the Bible is written to free us from.

If you've ever for a minute thought that living in a world ruled by God would be restrictive or oppressive, I wonder whether you've seriously considered what a world not ruled by this God would be like.

No right or wrong. No security or certainty. No reason or value. No purpose or meaning. Only chance.

[20 : 58] And the rest is what you imagine in your own mind. Is the world, then, of Gilgamesh? Or Atrahasis? Or Darwin?

Or Dawkins? Is that really the world we all want? I don't think so. I don't think so. There's the truth, perhaps, that instead, our own dark and chaotic minds and hearts resist and repel the sheer goodness and beauty and power and wisdom and holiness of the God of Genesis.

Does he not seem to our hearts to be simply too good to be true? If this is the creator, then, what sort of world has he created?

We see it as a world in which we are free to live without fear because it is a world that reflects who he is, full of life, beauty, goodness, and order.

Now, we could go through this verse by verse. It's 5 to 7, and we're on verse 3. We're not going to do that. But structures tell stories. And we get a much better sense of the story of our world's beginning by taking in the whole week at once.

[22 : 18] Okay, so we've got a couple of slides to help us see the blueprints, if you like, perfect, of God's week of creation. Here is God's plan for the week. We saw back in verse 2, it was described as formless and empty.

And so God remedies that in six days. Days 1, 2, and 3, God gives it form. He creates the structure or the skeleton that holds the world up. Day 1, he creates day separates it from night.

Day 2, he separates the sky and sea, he creates an atmosphere. Day 3, he gathers the sea together, creates land, and grows plants.

And thus, out of a formless world, a habitable world comes to pass. And then, on days 4, 5, and 6, God fills his newly formed world.

Day 4, he fills the sky with lights, the big and the little light, and the stars. Day 5, he fills the sea and sky with birds and fishes. Day 6, he fills the land with all kinds of creatures and animals, and ultimately, human beings.

[23 : 29] And as if to stress just how easy it was for God to finish creating everything in existence, he has a day spare at the end in which he rests, because he's done with his work of creating.

And if we go to the next slide, it's not even as if he had extra long days to get it finished. The days follow a simple order.

Perhaps he picked up this rhythm. As we read, God says, it's so. God says, it's so. God separates, he gathers, he commissions, he blesses, he gives things names, he sees that it's good.

And in fact, on days 3 and 6, he does it all again. Every day, God effortlessly brings life and order into being.

This chapter is so beautifully structured and written. We live then in a world that is formed, filled, and finished. And if you glance at verse 31, God's verdict on the whole thing.

[24 : 39] is that it is very good. What kind of world then do we live in? What kind of world did this God create?

Well, one that reflects back at him his own goodness and beauty and power and majesty and glory undimmed from before the dawn of time.

And again, the question is, who wouldn't want to live in a world like this? full of order, full of life, full of glory. And so, friends, here's the application.

Embrace the world view of Genesis. Do not be ashamed of it. What a world and what a God it presents to us. Believe it and live it and love it and share it.

you be of all people have reason to fearlessly enjoy life, do we not? Because we know and trust the creator who rules it.

[25 : 44] Brothers and sisters, this worldview should fill us with delight and joy and curiosity and wonder in the face of God's world. It's no wonder, is it, given what we have seen, that modern science and medicine began with people who believed this to be true, who trusted this creator.

Why wouldn't we want to go and discover and understand and delight in the work of God's world and his universe? Side point, Genesis is not anti-science, is it?

No, it screams to us, go and see, find out and discover what God has made. In the words of the astronomer Johann Kepler, in all that we've discovered and know about our world, our cosmos, our bodies, we are simply thinking God's thoughts after him.

And how many unwondrous they are, how brilliant and wise he is. Friends, do not be ashamed of this worldview. He is freeing and life-giving beyond anything that this world can give us.

the way this shows up in our lives, I think best, this witness to the truth is not by getting into debates about it, necessarily.

[27 : 08] There's a time, isn't there, to lovingly disagree with people who don't believe in God. But the best argument I think we can give the world as to the truth of this chapter is by showing the world what it's like to live with this God as your king, to show the world in your life what it is like to trust him and know him and how it frees you and gives you joy and confidence and hope.

And all the more so when we see that the world that God is so wonderfully created is none other than a temple for his worship. Where do we see that? Well, mainly in our second and briefer point in the crowning climax of the creative week, when God's image bearers come into the world.

Secondly, then, God's image bearers. What could be more fitting this God's supreme glory than a universe designed and created to praise and worship him?

Now, how do we know this cosmos is designed to be a temple? Well, the first clue is there in verse 14. What's the one job that the big and the little lights are given?

or one of the jobs? Let them serve as signs to mark sacred times. Sacred times for who? Or for what?

[28 : 31] Well, this is the second clue, isn't it? God's image bearers. And we'll spend more time on humanity next week as chapter 2 really zooms in on human beings in much more detail.

But here we see briefly that our place and purpose in God's world isn't small or incidental. When places of worship were dedicated in the ancient world, the big point, the big thing that happened was that people would carry in images or idols into the temple.

And as he has before, Moses picks up on this theme and puts a big twist on it because into his cosmic temple, God puts living images.

This is verse 26. Then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish and the sea, the birds, the sky, the livestock, the wild animals, over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. This is the crowning climax of God's creative week.

[29 : 49] Again, the structure tells the story. I've got a slide for this to you. There's a pattern in God's words, let there be, let there be, let the water, let the land.

Then again, for the second part, let there be, let the water, let the land, let us make. Suddenly, the whole tone shifts. The creation of human beings is the unique and crowning moment in God's plan. He sets them in his temple over his world to rule over life on earth. It's increase and multiply and fill the earth so that God's image is spread all throughout his cosmic temple.

and the result is to be worship. Worship. God is to be glorified through his image bearers and our place in the world.

This is our story. This is our place in God's world. And again, this is such good news for the ancient world. It gives us a dignity and value and purpose unknown to people before.

[30 : 55] And those myths they grew up with that I spoke about earlier. The gods decide that killing each other is quite hard work. And so they take the blood of a demon and create men and they do

that so that the people, the men, will serve them, labor for them, grow food and feed the gods.

And one of them, the chief god, says, I will create man on whom the toil of the gods will be laid so that they may rest. And then the gods decide that the men smell too bad and they go back off into heaven.

In the ancient world, men were born to be slaves of gods that really didn't like them very much. And women don't even get a mention. And again, how would it feel to know that that was ye?

What kind of self-worth or dignity could you find in a world like that? that God creates men and women in his image, giving every human being on the face of the earth the dignity and value and work of a monarch to rule, to fill his world and in so doing to reflect God's good and loving rule to all that he had made.

And just to prove that that's what's going on, God doesn't demand, does he, that they serve him food he serves them food. Look, verse 29. God said, I give ye every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it, they will be yours for food.

[32 : 36] And again, friends, we do not need to dig too deeply, do we? To see that turning away from our creator has not freed humanity, has not given us value, the stripped people of dignity, of self-worth.

In a world where our only value comes from the value that others place on us or the value that we seek in the eyes of others rather than the value that we have in the eyes of our creator, well, we just have no hope of any sense of lasting value.

The most vulnerable are terminated. every day for the living is a battle to feel and to be seen as worthwhile, whether it's in our work, our studies, at home, on the internet, in our own eyes.

Life without this God enslaves us to constantly changing opinions of ourselves and others to work for our value and to never find lasting worth.

And so the truth that God has made you and I in his own image is brilliant news. And so, brothers and sisters, again, embrace this worldview.

[33 : 56] Embrace your God-given identity. Why would we want to diminish or minimize this truth? Imagine that we were not created in his image.

It's royal, worshipping creatures. We'll have to wait a couple of weeks to see the answer to this question. But know that it is only by embracing and living out our true identity as image bearers of our creator that we find freedom as human beings.

It frees us, then, to stop working on our own image, whether in real life or online. What others think of us doesn't matter to us anymore because we have a God-given image that does not fade better than anything we could create for ourselves.

Because our creator has blessed us with his own image to reflect his glory in lives given over to his worship. And he blesses and delights in us and frees us and provides for us constantly.

for we are God's image bearers in his cosmic temple. And finally, we finish where God does very, very briefly with God's blessed rest.

[35 : 20] 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. And so, on the seventh day, he rested from all his work.

humanity might be the climax of creation, but here is its goal. Where is it all heading? Rest.

All God's creation. No more work. And a day of rest that does not end. Notice that in verse 3, what's missing? What would we expect?

Evening and morning. The seventh day. But it never comes. The sun never sets on that day. For God is still perfectly at rest.

And nothing, not even sin, has disturbed his rest or threatened to undo his finished work. And God calls us today to enter that rest.

[36 : 25] To join him there. To take up our place in that story that he had designed and created for us. To live under his rule. In his good world, as mirrors of his glory and to be forever at rest with our creator.

That is what we are made for. That is the freedom that he calls us to. And it is the peace, the rest, that we find in Christ's finished work. An end to our endless search for value, striving for purpose, for meaning.

Because we find it all in him. And so we are at rest with our maker. Let us praise him together now as we pray.

Let's pray together. God, our Father, how we worship ye and praise ye for your majesty and power and wisdom and glory.

Our Father, we marvel at all that ye have made and we marvel that ye have made us not to be your slaves, but to be your children.

[37 : 44] Father, we pray that you would help us please to embrace this wonderful truth of who you are and who we are and what our world is. Our Father, you know the darkness of our hearts and you know that they are often hard.

Father, we confess how quickly we turn inwards. Lord, to create for ourselves the world that we think we want. to seek, Lord, in ourselves our own value when truly you, our maker, have given us lasting and true value beyond anything that we could conjure up.

So, Father, we pray, set our hearts upon the truth of your word, lead us to Christ and give us rest in him who we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.