



Filling the Void

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This morning we'll be continuing our look at Genesis 1 with Days Four through Six, which you'll find covered in verses 14 to 31. Before we get into today's text, let's recap some important points we've seen over the past few weeks.

First, remember that Genesis 1 gives us a view of God creating the cosmos as a temple for himself. Each of these first six days shows him giving it shape: laying the foundation, building the walls, putting a roof over it; then he furnishes it with the instruments of worship and creates priests to worship him in the temple. Finally on the seventh day, God himself "rests"—he enters his temple and takes up his residence there, overseeing it, governing it, and caring for it. Genesis 1 gives us a view of Creation from a very different standpoint than we're used to. We like to think of Creation in terms of material origins. Genesis 1 speaks in the language of the ancient world. They weren't interested in where things came from or the technical details of how things came into being—that wasn't their mindset. No, they wanted to know "How?" and "Why?" And so Genesis 1 shows us Creation from a *functional* standpoint. It shows us the *purpose* of Creation, which is ultimately God's glory.

Verse 2 showed us the uncreated earth. It was a dark, watery abyss—the utter opposite of what is good for human life. The text says it was "formless and void"—it served no useful purpose and there was nothing about it that showed God's glory. Last Sunday we looked at verses 3 through 12, the first three "days". And on those days we saw God giving form and shape to what was formless. He created a cycle of day and night from the darkness on Day One. On Day Two he separated the waters

below from the waters above to create a place where he could create dry land. And then on Day Three we saw him separate the waters below and raise up dry land, which he then covered with plants that are good for food. And as he saw his handiwork, he proclaimed it "good". It wasn't just good that God's temple was taking shape. That *is* good. But more specifically, God called it good because what had been formless and void, what had been antithetical to human life, was now becoming habitable for human beings. God created us to glorify him and whatever supports us in our living for him is good. God sees a need and he provides. Remember that the Hebrew word "to see" also means "to provide". God never does one without also doing the other.

Now, the next three days—Four, Five, and Six—parallel the first three days. God has formed what was formless. He's created static spheres: the heavens, the sky and the sea, and the land. In this second three-day set we're going to see him fill each of those static spheres with life. Think of the temple analogy again. God has built the building, now he's going to furnish it. Look at verses 14-19:

And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

One the first day God created a cycle of day and night by which we can measure time. Here on Day Four he now fills that cycle of day and night with functionaries. And it's their function, not their material origin or composition, that is the focus. These verses show

God placing the sun, moon, and stars on the surface of the firmament or expanse that holds back the heavenly sea. He sets them in their courses, the sun to rule or govern the day and the moon to rule or govern the night and together all these heavenly lights, he says, are to be signs—to show us—the passing of days and of years and of seasons.

God gives these heavenly lights a role to play in the temple, but notice that their role is a supporting role for the human beings he hasn't created yet. Birds and fish and animals take note of day and night, but only human beings take note of the passing years. And the word "seasons" that we see in verse 14 is especially important. When we think of seasons we think of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, but the Hebrew word used here points to the seasonal religious festivals that God have commanded his people to observe. It points to the priestly role that human beings are going to have in the temple as they worship God. The sun and moon and stars are part of the life giving order of the cosmos, but they're also there to help us as we worship and give glory to our Creator.

This is also one of the places in Genesis where we see God directing his people toward a new way of thinking and of seeing the Creation. In the pagan nations that surrounded the Israelites the heavenly bodies were often thought to be gods. Here God shows his people that there's nothing divine about the sun, moon, and stars; they're part of the created order, they're subject to the spoken command of God. This is probably why the text doesn't name these lights; they're just lights, or the "lesser" and "greater" lights. In the ancient world the sun and moon and other heavenly bodies were called by the names of gods. God reminds the people here that they're just "lights", just created things. He also directs the people away from astrology and a worldview that sees the heavenly bodies as somehow controlling or directing the lives of human beings. God shows them that these lights in the sky have no such power, they simply govern the cycle of day and night, they help us track the passing of time, and they show us those times throughout the year when we

gather to offer our formal worship to our Creator. And after all this, at the end of Day Four, God sees these heavenly lights running their courses across the firmament and he declares his work to be good. He's provided for the needs of his people-priests.

Now look at verses 20 to 23. On Day Two God had separated the waters below from the waters above. Think of it like a snow globe but with the water on the outside and the air on the inside. Day Five parallels Day Two as God fills the sky and the sea.

And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

God fills the empty sky with birds and he fills the empty sea with fish and he gives them all their functions: he commands them to be fruitful and multiply. That's they're function in his temple. In modern scientific terms we might talk about the functions of all these different birds and fishes specifically. The more we learn about nature the more we learn how interconnected everything is. Birds often carry the seeds that spread the plants. The fish feed the birds that soar through the sky. But for that whole system to work, those birds and fish have to be fruitful and multiply. One species dies off or is hunted to extinction and it upsets the whole system. God obviously knows what he's doing—there's purpose to everything and so he calls it "good".

One thing that will escape our notice as modern readers is the attention the verse 21 gives specifically to what the ESV calls "the great sea creatures." The

Hebrew word literally refers to sea monsters or sea dragons—to mythical creatures that people of the ancient near east believed to inhabit the sea. Remember that these people feared the sea—it represented the chaotic primordial abyss that existed before their gods gave form and function to the earth. To them the sea was the last vestige of that chaos that was antithetical to human life—the sea was territory outside the created order, maybe not totally void, but still formless—and it was prowled by great monsters that represented that chaos. In Mesopotamian mythology the sea monsters were the enemies of the gods who gave order. That was the worldview that surrounded the Israelites and so here God corrects them; he shows them the truth of his Creation. The sea is his as much as the land is. He's filled the sea with fish and given them dominion over it and even whatever great sea monsters might be lurking out there in the depths, even they are his. They aren't his enemies, out of his control in some great cosmic battle between order and chaos; they are his creatures and even they are part of the good he has created.

Finally on Day Six God fills the empty land with his creatures, but he does it in two phases: first animals and then human beings. Look first at verses 24 and 25:

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

The creation of animals parallels the creation of the fish and birds. As they filled the sea and the sky, so the animals fill the land. Verse 24 covers the full range of animals: "livestock" or "cattle" refers to the domesticated animals we eat for food, "creeping things" refers to undomesticated animals that run in

herds, and "beasts" refers to the great carnivores and beasts of prey. Again, animals play an important role in nature. More importantly for human beings, they serve as a source of food and as helpers in our work, and so God sees his handiwork and calls it good. But one thing that's conspicuously absent here is the giving of dominion. God gave dominion over day and night to the heavenly lights, he gave dominion of the sea to the fish and of the sky to the birds, but he doesn't give dominion of the land to the animals. God has bigger plans for the land. Look at verses 26-31:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in his own image,

in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Humanity is the culmination of God's work. Everything else up to this point has been "good" because it has prepared the way for human beings. We see the importance of this right from the start. With everything else, from the creation of the day to the creation of the animals,

the text introduces each creative act with the words, “And God said” followed by his creative command. But here there’s deliberation: “And God said, ‘*Let us make man.*’” That points out that humanity is different from everything else so far. God also addresses his heavenly court before he creates this time. In each of the other instances God worked alone, but now he gathers an audience. He says “Let us”. It’s tempting to think of “let us” as a reference to the Trinity, but the other four times in the Old Testament that this same grammatical construction is used are almost certainly not references to the Trinity, but to the heavenly court. This isn’t denying the Trinity, it’s just that the Trinity isn’t the focus of this particular text. God’s preparing to play his finale here and so he gathers an audience. And note too that before he creates human beings God describes what he’s going to do. Humanity is to be created in his image. The animals were created “according to their kinds” but humanity is created in God’s image—in a sense, according to *his* divine kind.

Why are we created in God’s image? Remember the temple-building theme. The heavens and the sea and land are the building, the heavenly lights, the birds and fish, and the animals are like the furnishing or the implements used in worship, but human beings are the priests. God creates us to know him, to be in fellowship with him, to worship him, and to give him glory. And that’s why God sees the creation of human beings and doesn’t just call it good; this time he calls it “*very good.*”

In pagan cultures idols of wood or stone bore the image of the gods and represented the gods to the people. And in the pagan creation myths human beings were created as an afterthought. The cosmos was created for the benefit of the gods and it was only after they were finished that they created humans, usually to be their slaves and to do the work that the gods were too lazy to do. Genesis paints a very different picture. God created the earth specifically for us. He separated the waters and called forth the dry land for us. He put the heavenly

lights in the sky and created bird and fish and animals for us—for our benefit, for our well-being, for our life. And then he created us in his image. Again, why? That we might know him; that we might be able to identify with him. We’re not dumb brutes called to worship a god we can never understand. He gave us ears that might know that he hears our cry. He gave us eyes that we might know that he sees our pain. He gave us his image that we might worship him not as some unknowable and violent volcano god to be feared, but as a loving Creator who takes an active and caring role in the lives of his people.

God’s creation, in that sense, is human-centred. We’re the focus and the pinnacle of Creation. But God did this for a reason. He created us and makes provision for our life so that our attention can be centred on him—not as slaves, but as children to a loving Father and as creatures to a caring Creator. Other gods created human beings as slaves; our God created us as his priests. He provides for us that we might be free to give him our loving and faithful service. The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What is the chief end of man?” And answer is that “[t]he chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” That’s our purpose in Creation. Consider that even when we rejected God and rejected his loving gifts and his care for us, when we made him our enemy, he sent his own Son to be a sacrifice for our sins that we might be restored to his fellowship and return to his worship as his priests, his holy people. Jesus died so that we can return to God and return to the priestly role for which we were created. And consider what Scripture tells us about the end of the story—about the culmination of Creation and redemptive history. The New Testament tells us that in the New Jerusalem darkness and the abyss will be no more—there will be nothing left in Creation that is antithetical to human life—death and sin will be swallowed up in victory; all pain and suffering will be gone and every tear will be dried so that God’s people might live eternally to worship him and to give him glory—to serve as his priests—as we were created

to do. Do you ever think of that? So often we take Creation for granted. God established the cosmos to meet our needs that we might be free to give him glory. How often do we take the Cross for granted? Remember, brothers and sisters, that Jesus sacrificed himself that we might once again live to give God glory. And how often do we think of the New Jerusalem solely as a place created for our enjoyment and forget that there God will perfectly meet every need so that we can live eternally before his face to give him glory? Friends, if we would be ready for heaven, let us spend our lives as God intended for us; let us be devoted to him, let us be his priests, representing him to the world as his image bearers. Let us give him glory through our own thanks and praise, through our loving obedience, and let us cause the world to give him glory as it sees his image in us.

Let us pray. Almighty God, our loving Father and our caring Creator, thank you for the life you have given us. We thank you for the gift of your Creation. We thank you for providing for our needs that we might be free to glorify you with our lives. We give you even greater thanks for offering your only Son as a sacrifice for our sins that we might be forgiven and return to lives of worship. Forgive us, Father, for the times when we take your provision for granted. Give us grace to remember that you have created us to give you glory through our worship and by faithfully bearing your image to the world. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.