

WHAT IS CREATION?:
What We Believe, Week Two
Genesis 1; Romans 8:18-23; Revelation 21:1-5a

INTRO

Good morning Lake Wylie. If you have a Bible begin turning to Genesis 1. The first chapter of the Bible. If you're using a Bible from the pew rack in front of your it's on page 1.

Now, if you've been here at Lake Wylie for more than one week you may realize there are new pew Bibles. That's because up until this week we've actually had two different kinds of Bibles in the pews, which means any time I give a page number, half of the audience can't find the passage. Besides that, I preach from the English Standard translation, and our pew Bibles were all New King James. So it meant anyone using a pew Bible wasn't reading the same translation as me.

So, last week, the deacons said, "Order some Bibles." So there you go. We're going to take all of the Bibles that were in the pews and use them to stock our classrooms, as well as gifts—so let me say this. If you don't own a Bible, we'd love for you to have one if you'll read it. Our church believes that life and truth are found in God's Word, and we'd be thrilled to give you a free copy of God's Word, wouldn't we church?

Alright, let me tell you one more really cool thing before we jump into our text. For the past few weeks, those of us who've been attending Sunday night Bible study have realized that if you took an EKG of our church it would spike once a week, on Sundays.

We have Bible study groups that meet Sunday morning, gathered worship on Sunday morning, we meet for prayer on Sunday evening, and Bible study Sunday evening. In other words, our church's heart beats really big on Sunday, then nothing for the rest of the week.

So we've prayed and realized that our church would be far healthier if our heart beat really big on Sunday morning, and then again midweek on Wednesday. So we are going to move the adult prayer time and

Bible study from Sunday night to Wednesday night. Students and Children will continue to meet on Sunday nights at their regular time. So tonight, Students and children will meet like normal, and this Wednesday night our adults will meet at 6:30 for prayer, and at 7:00pm for Bible study.

I hope to see you there.

Whew... let's turn now to our text. And I know what some of you are thinking... Oh no! We're just now getting to the sermon... this is going to be a longer day... maybe, but because we start at 10AM you'll still beat all the Methodists to Grid Iron so relax.

SERMON

This past week was my daughter, Olivia's, birthday, and we took her to see the new Pixar movie, Finding Dory. Dory, is this little blue fish who has short term memory loss. She's constantly forgetting what she was just doing. She messes up names all the time.

And in the very beginning of the film all these little fish are learning about migration—going home. And the big Sting Ray who's the teacher says, the reason all of the fish know how to get back home on migration is through instinct—something deep inside you that you have to listen to.

It's at that moment that Dory remembers her family. She can't remember much else about herself. She doesn't know what she had for breakfast, but she knows that she had a beginning. Something deep within, that she can't ignore says, "Though I can't remember most things, some things are obvious. I remember that I had a family because I had to come from somewhere."

For you and me, when we look around at this world we see more than atoms colliding at random. We see more than mass and energy. We see beyond the stars and deep within us, something that we can't ignore echoes and repeats,

“Though I don’t know all things, one thing is obvious. **I remember that I had a home. I know all of this around me had a beginning. It had to come from somewhere.**”

Today we’re going to follow that trail. We’ll answer the question, “What is Creation?” under three headings:

1. THE ORIGIN OF CREATION
2. THE CORRUPTION OF CREATION
3. THE RENEWAL OF CREATION

1. THE ORIGIN OF CREATION

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. ⁶ And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And the rest of the chapter repeats this pattern:

And God said,
Let there be,
And it was so,
And God saw that it was good.

Water and land, fields and trees, Sun, Moon, Stars, Galaxies flung into the universe. Fish, birds, live-stock. Human beings, made in his image.

There are a million things we could observe here, but when we look at the origin of creation I want you to note two things:

The Christian view of creation is that creation is good, but it’s not God. It’s good but it’s not God.

Look at verse 4:

⁴ And God saw that the light was good.

Now, the author isn’t telling you that God learned something. He didn’t create light and then say, “Oh! Light! Wow. I had no idea!” No, when the God tells us that he saw the light was good, he isn’t telling us he learned that light was good—he’s telling us how we you and I should think about the light. And he did the same with the rest of creation. If you read all of chapter one here’s what you see:

- God makes the continents and oceans- **it’s good.**
- Fields and trees **They’re good.** When you look at a paper birch peeling its bark, you should say with God, “Wow, this is awesome.”
- Celestial bodies. Sit outside and look at the Moon tonight—**it’s good.**
- Marine life, bird’s live stock. Just the other day I was pulling some weeds around our AC unit at home, and a big old toad jumped out. Scared me to death. But you know what—God made that toad. He may be a little slimy to me, but God made and knows that little toad that lives under my AC unit, and God says, **“It’s good.”**
- Human beings—they’re made in God’s image. Every single one of them, **because they are creations of God, God says there’s an ingrained goodness to that.**

The created order has an inherent goodness that we are to recognize, enjoy, and love.

But, it creation isn’t God. Look back at verse 1:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

When we get to the first sentence of the Scriptures, we see that God is already there. Before all things. God doesn't create the world out of pre-existing material. Before the beginning of time and space, there's nothing but God.

And, therefore, **creation isn't God. It's good, but it's not God.** And this makes Christianity rather unique in the world.

Some worldviews say, "**Creation is evil.**" Therefore, the goal of life is to ascend and ascend and ascend until you leave the physical dimension behind and pass into a purely spiritual dimension.

Some worldviews say, "**Creation is all there is.**" Creation is everything. The material cosmos is all that exists. There isn't any objective meaning, purpose, or significance in the world, except for the meaning, purpose, and significance you create for yourself.

But Christianity is different than both. Christians say, "Creation is good, so we don't try to escape it. Creation isn't God, so we don't worship it."

- Possessions: **Christian's should be neither materialists, nor should they be ascetics.** A materialist Christian believes worldly possessions are the evidence of my rightness and God's happiness for me. An ascetic says, "The less I have the more holy I am and God will be most pleased with that!" Neither of these is a Christian ethic of ownership. It's neither poverty, nor riches. Because God says the world he created is good we can take pleasure in owning material possessions. But because none of them are God they are all to be held with an open hand.
- Work: If you look down at verse 28 of the chapter, God creates male and female and then says this:

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."

I don't know if you realize this but work is a good gift from God. Work isn't something humans had to do because of sin. Here, in the garden, God give what theologians call The Cultural Mandate. Here's what it means: the work that we do is an act of obedience and holiness and and immeasurable good. Human beings are called to be cultural architects through their work. The problem is that we either think too little or too much of work.

It's a good gift. Enjoy it. Bless Charlotte through your work. See it as a gift of God's grace. Don't belittle work. At the same time—don't make it your God. **Work makes a great ministry—it makes a terrible master.**

So this is the Christian view of the origin of creation. God is primary. Creation depends upon him. It's a good thing that God created, but it isn't God. Now let's see:

2. THE CORRUPTION OF CREATION

Now, typically, to talk about the fall and corruption of the world we'd go 2 chapters over to Genesis 3, but we'll actually be there in 2 weeks when we talk about sin and death--- so today let's go to Romans 8. Before we read, you have to know that a lot has taken place between Genesis 1 and Romans 8. We know that because the world doesn't currently look like Genesis 1. We don't live in a Genesis 1 world.

In fact, when we read Genesis 1 we only see echoes of it in the present age. The goodness of the sun and moon are daily eclipsed by the darkness of tragedy. How ought we to think of that?

Romans 8:18-23

*¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation **waits with eager longing** for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was **subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope** ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its **bondage to corruption** and obtain the freedom of the*

glory of the children of God.²² For we know that **the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.**

²³ **And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.¹**

Our present age is characterized by a sense of waiting—always being on the edge—eagerly longing, Paul says. Why? Because in this present age all of creation has been subjected to futility.

All of us, and even the ground beneath our feet knows the frustration of futility. There is a grasping sense that no matter how hard we work, no matter how hard we try, no matter how smart we become, we are all of us, caught in the steel cold grip of futility.

I love growing flowers. This year has been my best yet. I started them from see way back in March, under grow lights in the house. I've nurtured them, transplanted them, fed them, watered them, pruned them. And, all around my beautiful blooms, without work, without toil, without a shred of labor weeds are trying to take over!

And, listen! From the weeds of the soil to the cancer in our bones—Paul says, “All creation eagerly waits to be set free from its bondage of corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Not only that, but every generation since Adam has felt the same ruinous futility of this life. He says the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth **until now!** You know what that means? It means we're all tempted to think there's something special about the suffering of our time—but it's not. Our experience is the same experience of every single human in history. This world isn't the way it's supposed to be, and it's been like this for a long time.

- Terrorist groups aren't supposed to breed plots of destruction.

- Christians aren't supposed to look down their noses at the sins of others.
- Parents shouldn't have to bury children.
- Floods and earthquakes aren't supposed to tear the ground apart.

Why is all this happening?

It's because, back in the garden—we chose to leave our home. We walked out on God. We took his good gifts and placed him above his head and tried to use him as a stepping stone to them. And it wrecked everything. We took the very things that God gave us, and made them our everything.

What's wrong with us? What's wrong with our world—we seek our meaning and purpose not in God, but in other people, and other possessions, and our work. We elevated creation to the place of creator—and that's a path to death.

And the futility that we all experience is actually a gift of God's grace! In verse 20 God is the one who subjected creation to futility. Paul tells us that creation was subjected to futility, in hope. The curse is a gift of grace.

If a parent sees their child about to stick a fork into an outlet they push the child out of the way. The kids plan doesn't succeed, they even get some scrapes. The parent has subjected the child's plans to futility—in hope.

And so we groan inwardly, as we daily experience the effects of the curse we brought on by abandoning God for ourselves.

So, how do we respond to all that? I think we begin where Paul begins: Christian's hate death—and we groan over it. Being a pastor I attend many funerals, and there's this phrase that has crept into our funeral vocabulary that is entirely anti-Christian.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ro 8:18–23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Have you ever been in a funeral home for a viewing, and all the people are remembering the life of the one who has died and someone says, “Well, death is just....” Apart of life, right?

No! I understand what they mean—that because we live in a sin broken world this life ends in death. But death isn’t just a part of life. If you want to do something really radical, and really Christian—stop using that phrase. Death isn’t a part of life—**death is a perversion of life!** When you sit in a funeral home and stare at a casket, where death has snatched a soul from the body and something deep down in you wants to cry out, “This isn’t right! It’s not supposed to be this way!”—That’s a very Christian thing to say.

If death is just a part of life, and we lose everything at death then what on earth are we here for? That view ends in hopelessness and depression.

There’s a moment in the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* when Augustus finally admits his hidden feelings for Hazel:

“I’m in love with you,” he said quietly.

"Augustus," I said.

"I am," he said. He was staring at me, and I could see the corners of his eyes crinkling. "I'm in love with you, and I'm not in the business of denying myself the simple pleasure of saying true things. I'm in love with you, and I know that love is just a shout into the void, and that oblivion is inevitable, and that we're all doomed and that there will come a day when all our labor has been returned to dust, and I know the sun will swallow the only earth we'll ever have, and I am in love with you."

Don’t you see? He’s saying—something I can’t explain from within wants to be joined to you in love—and yet I’m committed to this worldview that says this world, and this life is all there is—so my love doesn’t really mean anything. It’s just atoms colliding in my brain chemistry—and it will all come undone in the end!

The Scriptures say no! Life! Love! Friendship! Children! Sunsets! These are the way the world is supposed to be and we should groan at death and fight it tooth and nail.

Christians, because we know that there is a life beyond this body, and because we know there is an objective ground to our love for one another we should fight for life, fight for love, fight for justice.

At the end of this sermon series we’re going to take 4 weeks and go through the book of Jonah—it’s going to be a call for us to go and serve, and love, and minister to our city. And it’s all built on this theology of creation. It’s good—it’s not God—and it’s currently groaning and we’re sent as God’s emissaries, until he returns to shine light on darkness, defend the helpless, love the unlovable, and preach life to those who are dead in their sins and trespasses—for such we once were—and then we were found.

So we’ve seen the origin and the corruption of creation. Now let’s see:

3. THE RENEWAL OF CREATION

Revelation 21:1-6

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Friends, my heart longs for this day. What the Apostle John shows us at the end of the Scriptures is the complete reversal of the bondage of corruption Paul wrote of.

A new heaven—literally—a new kind. It's of a qualitative difference. You haven't seen or imagined anything like it!

And the city of God is coming down to us, and God is coming to dwell with us! That which was lost and we thought was gone forever stands renewed. The King returns and reclaims all his land. He sets all things right. He reverses the curse.

John says—it's all new. Everything that was before has passed like storm in the night.

Notice first of all, that back in Genesis God places man in a garden and says, "Work and create culture." Now at the end he places man in a city." Sin didn't wreck his purposes.

Notice, also, **how** the city comes to us. We don't go up to it. We don't claw and work our way up! It comes down, out of heaven from God. It's prepared for us. We don't prepare ourselves for it. And God himself comes down. We don't ascend up to him. He comes down.

When God gave this vision to the Apostle John he was telling John a crucial detail about the road to God's city. Human beings have tried from the beginning to ascend up and up and up to take God's place—and they never make it that way. God has to come down to you. He has to condescend to us. We never act good enough, or obey enough, or pray enough, or have enough faith to say, "Yes! I've arrived—I've outworked all those wretches down there. I've earned it."

And look at what happens in that new city where God comes to dwell with us: *He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

When was the last time that someone was so close to you, they could reach out with their thumb, and wipe a tear from your eye?

My goodness, when God ushers in this new creation it's going to be so wonderful we'll barely remember what this moment is like.

How can all of this come true? We don't deserve it. We're the ones who left God, who've been exiled from the garden. How could this new heaven and new earth come down to us? Why at the end of all things would God come down to dwell with us?

It's because he's already done it.

- God will dwell—because he's already come to dwell.
- He'll wipe away every tear—because in the garden Jesus entered into our tears—and he didn't just weep—in his anguish he sweated blood.
- In the new heavens the curse will be removed—because at the cross the curse was placed upon Jesus.
- There won't be any death there—because Christ took death into himself.
- The heavens will be remade—because Christ was unmade.

We don't serve God because he judges evil—we serve God because when he judged the evil of this world—he took it into himself. And, because he's done that, one day he's going to remake all things!