

Creator, Lord, Savior

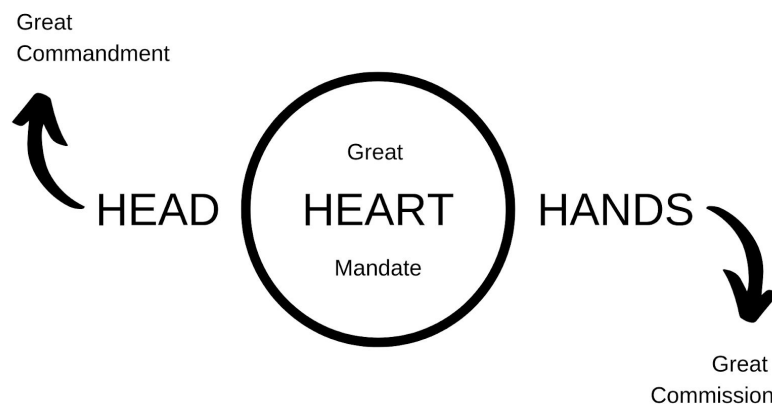
Genesis 1:1-2:3

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. It's summer time! And time for a new sermon series. Today I'm excited to be kicking off our journey through the first book of the Bible called Genesis, which we will be taking one section at a time over the next several summers. The first leg this summer will be chapters 1-11 under the subtitle, "Creating Culture". What's the meaning behind that subtitle, and the artwork that goes with it? Let me explain.

Genesis, as the literal meaning of the word implies, is all about the formation of something at the very beginning. Not only does Genesis set the stage for the entire Bible, it explains the beginning of the world as we know it; and most importantly, it's the foundation of God's revelation of himself. This is huge! Without Genesis, we would be left to so many sad existential questions. But with Genesis, we can know how things came to be, how things are intended to be, and why things aren't the way they're supposed to be. And all that is packed into these first few chapters.

Why preach through Genesis right now in the life of Antioch? It's not like we're at the beginning of our existence as a church. In fact, next month we're going to celebrate our ten-year anniversary. The reason why Genesis is timely for Antioch is because we are walking through an important season of development as a church; not so much in what we think or what we do, but in who we are—our identity, our culture. We are seeking to build on the foundation that has been laid in the first ten years toward the culture of the next ten years. Consider this graphic:



We might think of the holistic culture of Antioch as the combination of head, heart, and hands. The temptation before us is to overemphasize one part of who we are.

For example, we might become overly concerned with the head and focus mostly on knowledge and doctrine. In some ways this would be an overemphasis of the Great Commandment to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves. This is what led the Pharisees to be obsessed with the Law and to test Jesus with the question of which commandment was the greatest.¹ Like the old saying, we would be so heavenly-minded that we're no earthly good.

Or, we could become overly concerned with the hands and focus mostly on obedience and production. This would be an overemphasis of the Great Commission to go and make disciples.² The spirit of this is why Jesus made his disciples wrestle with the question, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and [yet] forfeits his soul?"³ It's being so earth-focused, so caught up in the grit of a fallen world that you shrivel your soul. This is probably the most relevant to the story of our church.

The funny thing about either camp, head or hands, is that the overemphasis is considered a virtue. It's like the truly spiritual life is when you're focused mostly on the right doctrine or the right mission; or that the only things in life that are spiritual are the things that talk about God or do something for God, like Christian movies or mission trips. But recognizing God only into parts of our life and world is more of a vice than a virtue. So we don't want to overemphasize either the head or the hands.

But we also don't want to neglect either of them. What is it, then, that tethers these two components of a church's culture together, but also holds them in check? It's the heart, the formation of character. In a word, it's soulfulness. Soulfulness is having your head in the clouds of glorious truths about God, and your feet planted firmly on the gritty realities of the earth. It's recognizing you are an embodied soul in a world that will be made new, rather than an imprisoned spirit in a body and world from which to escape.

A soulful life sees everything through the lens of our creating and re-creating God. And there's the connection to Genesis: soulfulness is rooted in the Great Mandate, the original command and commission to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and

¹ Matthew 22:34-40

² Matthew 28:18-20

³ Matthew 16:26

subdue it,” a mandate we will consider from very beginning of Genesis.⁴ So, there couldn’t be a better time to walk through this amazing, culture-creating book.

With that said, please open your Bibles with me to Genesis 1:1-2:3, which you can find on page 1 if you’re using one of the Bibles in the chairs. The title of today’s sermon is “Creator, Lord, Savior” and the main idea is this: Because God was Creator, Lord, and Savior from the beginning, he is Creator, Lord, and Savior to the end. Here’s how the sermon will break down (which you can find in your special edition guide for taking notes—if you don’t have one, they are on the table beside the sound booth):

- 1) God is Creator—He Created the Universe Out of Chaos - 1:1-2
- 2) God is Lord—He Established a Perfect World By His Word - 1:3-31
- 3) God is Savior—He Blessed His Creation to Share His Rest - 2:1-3

Since today’s passage is so long, and we’ll be walking through it one verse at a time, I’m not going to ask you to stand. Instead, I’m going to ask you to posture your heart to receive the preaching of God’s word, even if it goes a bit longer than usual. And yet still we offer this blessing:

May the Word preached here today echo in our hearts and among the nations. And all God’s people said, *Amen*.

Exposition

Recently as I’ve been walking through a new season of exploration and healing in my journey with depression and abusive wounds, there has been a recurring theme coming up in conversations of both formal and informal counsel. It’s this: although many things are wonderful about the theology of our tribe of Christians (by that I mean Reformed Baptist), something that we underemphasize to our own harm is the beauty and goodness of our identity as humans being created in the image of God. It’s not that we don’t believe that truth; it’s that we don’t give it the same attention as we do the truth of total depravity, or in other words, that we are all sinful by nature since the first man and woman’s disobedience against God.⁵ My counselor put it to me this way:

For some reason our tribe starts at Genesis 3 instead of Genesis 1. But sin is parasitic, it only hosts on what is good rather than having a life of its own. It’s like cancer. It

⁴ Genesis 1:28

⁵ R. C. Sproul, “TULIP and Reformed Theology: Total Depravity,” <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/tulip-and-reformed-theology-total-depravity/>

*destroys what is healthy. There has to be something good before there's something bad. When our script is that we're only depraved, worthless creatures, we only confirm it.*⁶

Amazingly, not long after Jim said this to me, I noticed in the little Bible storybook I'm using with my girls right now that, even though it begins with the creation story, the gospel presentation in the back starts with these words, "We live in a world contaminated by sin."⁷ When you awaken to this theme and the damage it does to your identity as a person created in God's good image, I guess you start to see it everywhere.

That alone would be reason enough for us to soak deeply in Genesis 1 and 2. No doubt it was when first written, most likely by Moses, to teach God's Old Testament people, the nation of Israel. They lived in a time and place surrounded by many different groups of people, each with a story they had fashioned to make sense of life. Most often those stories included manipulating different gods connected to different parts of nature, each story as bizarre as the next. The unique reality for the people of Israel was they were instead ruled by one God, the Lord of all. Imagine how crazy that would've sounded to people! Therefore, in order to maintain their true identity, the people of Israel needed a clear account not just of who they were, but *who their God was*. Imagine the identity-shaping power of responding to critics by pointing to the book of Genesis and saying, "The God who created [us] as his own people is [actually] the [same] God who created the universe and all that is in it." So, Genesis starts with, not how bad the world is, but how good the God who made it. Creation sets the stage perfectly for the most important reality for Israel and all people: *God*, in all his goodness and all his power.⁸

That means more than a biological book, Genesis is a theological book—it's focused on the study of God and his relationship to people, especially Israel.⁹ Therefore it's not written in a way that's meant to provide every detail about the creation and development of the world. In fact, the more closely you study it, you end up with as many questions as answers. Many things are veiled in mystery, because as finite creatures relating to an infinite Creator, God himself is veiled in mystery. The creation account is meant to leave us deeply humbled, in awe and wonder at the beauty and power of our Creator God. So if you walk away from it with a sense of superiority toward others and

⁶ Jim Cofield, author of *The Relational Soul*

⁷ Ura Miller, *101 Favorite Stories From the Bible*, 216

⁸ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), Kindle Edition, Loc 1071-1080; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1967), 47

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 59

eagerness to argue, or with a sense of despair toward God and eagerness to distrust, I think you're reading it wrong. The invitation from these words that reveal God out of the chaos of our lives is the same as the words that revealed God out of the original chaos: it's an invitation to trust.¹⁰

1) God is Creator—He Created the Universe Out of Chaos - 1:1-2

That brings us to the first reality we learn from this passage: that God is Creator—he created the universe out of chaos. Read with me in verse 1:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

Let's be clear, the beginning that's being referred to here is *our* beginning, not God's. To be a Creator means his beginning is not in view—he's the "begin-ner" of others. In fact, one rabbi has famously taught that the first Hebrew letter of Genesis is intentionally **the** letter bet: ב . (Keep in mind the Hebrew alphabet faces the opposite direction of English, so the opening is actually looking forward, not backward.) This is said to be a symbol that readers of Genesis cannot investigate what is above the heavens or what is below the earth or what is before creation in eternity past; the only thing that is open for investigation is that which comes after the point of creation.¹¹ From the beginning, then, what is revealed is wrapped in mystery.

However, from our vantage point in history, we have the privilege of seeing beyond this veil to some extent. If you've ever read through the Gospel of John, then you might remember how it starts with the exact same phrase as Genesis:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1

What John is referring to is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.¹² The Psalms speak of him,

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. Psalm 90:2

¹⁰ Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 25, 29

¹¹ Kass, 25-26

¹² Ross, Loc 1135-1136

So Genesis is telling us from the start that this God is *creating*; in other words, he's producing something new and perfect.¹³ What is this new and perfect thing? It's "the heavens and the earth," a poetic expression used throughout this chapter to refer to the whole of something—which, in this instance, is the whole universe.¹⁴

In order to fully appreciate the wonder of what's happening here, just think about how hard it is to be creative. We're not talking about crafting something that already exists to look like something that already exists, like whittling a stick into something you can roast a marshmallow on. We're talking the unmatched creative power to take *nothing* and make it into *something*. More than that, into something as big and perfect and amazing as the universe. And more than that still, that universe coming from worse than nothing—from chaos. That's just what's made clear in verse 2, which says,

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. Genesis 1:2

This may come as a surprise, but the description Genesis provides here is less creation-out-of-nothing and more creation-out-of-chaos. The tone is ominous and uncomfortable. The earliest stage of the earth is "without form and void," or in other words, a chaotic, disorderly waste. There is also "darkness over the face of the deep," or in other words, a lifeless, watery abyss. You get the sense that there's nothing good about this—not that it's sinful, but just not good. And it leaves us wondering, where did this stuff come from? Didn't God create everything from nothing? Is this a re-creation of some sort?¹⁵

Well, even though the Bible makes it absolutely clear later that God creates everything from nothing, including this primordial chaos, Genesis by itself leaves us hanging a little bit.¹⁶ Why in the world would the author write it this way? This is another reminder that the primary focus of Genesis is to make a statement about God, not about all the scientific details of creation.¹⁷ We so easily forget that the very nature of being creatures is that we can't know everything about our Creator, as Moses reminds us later in the Old Testament:

¹³ Ross, Loc 1129-1132

¹⁴ Ross, Loc 1132-1134

¹⁵ Ross, Loc 1137-1159; Wenham, 73-74

¹⁶ Derek Thomas, "Creation Ex Nihilo," <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/creation-ex-nihilo/>

¹⁷ Kass, 46

²⁹ “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. Deuteronomy 29:29

The mystery isn't meant to lead us to doubt, but to trust. We don't have to have all the answers in Genesis. What we are given is more than enough. We can acknowledge there is this sort of mysterious chaos, because, more importantly, there is this Spirit of God hovering over it all, like an eagle “fluttering over its young.”¹⁸

2) God is Lord—He Established a Perfect World By His Word - 1:3-31

And if we acknowledge the chaos, we can begin to see more clearly that God is more than just Creator. This brings us to the second reality we learn from this passage: that God is Lord—he established a perfect world by his Word. The story continues in verse 3:

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. Genesis 1:3-5

This section kicks off a clear pattern in the six days of creation, and we'll move through it pretty quickly, making a few observations along the way.¹⁹

The first thing we notice is that the means of creation isn't God rolling up his sleeves and getting to work—it's him basically speaking things into being by his Word alone. I mean, what shows off absolute power more than being able to give any command and it immediately happens? And we do well here to return to the Gospel of John and remember something about this powerful, life-giving Word: it's not just a spoken word, it is a living Word, a Person, Jesus Christ. John continues about this Word,

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:3-4²⁰

Interestingly, how John concludes takes us back to Genesis for our next observation. The very first thing that is brought into life by the Word is *light*:

¹⁸ Ross, Loc 1155-1159

¹⁹ Ross, Loc 1095-1097

²⁰ Ross, Loc 1161-1163

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. Genesis 1:3-5

Of course, this is physical light, but it’s much more than that. It is the life-giving light of men. And light is the opposite of darkness, which is a theme that carries on throughout the entire Bible. Light is considered good and darkness not good.²¹ And so this kicks off one of the central ideas of this chapter: that God puts chaos into order, and he often does so by making separations, by guiding things to be exactly where they belong. For example, for his Old Testament people God is going to separate them from the pagan chaos of the world—why?—so they can belong to him, and be a sign for others to belong to him. God is going to give them hundreds of laws to guide their lives—why?—because apparently disorder is not what’s best for them.²²

Part of how God separated the light from the darkness was by naming them. Naming something is a sign of power over something—if you own it, then you name it. So God says, ‘You are gonna be called Day, and you are gonna be called Night, and even though I made you separate, I’m going to use you both to form a morning and evening, which will make a day.’²³

And so we arrive at one of the most distracting topics that comes from Genesis 1: what is meant by these six “days” of creation? Numerous legitimate arguments can be made:

- You could say that it literally means six twenty-four-hour days.
- You could also say that it refers to an unspecified amount of time, even six epochs.
- You could also say that it’s just an expression that’s not meant to be defined.²⁴

What I do I say? I say that which lines the top of our doctrinal statement as a church:

*In essential beliefs, we have unity. In non-essential beliefs we have diversity. In all our beliefs, we promote love.*²⁵

²¹ Ross, Loc 1166-1168

²² Wenham, 77

²³ Ross, Loc 1177-1178; Wenham, 77

²⁴ Ross, Loc 1180-1181

²⁵ Antioch Church, “Beliefs,” <https://www.antiochpeople.org/beliefs>

Our stance as a church is that the scientific details of precisely how creation came into being is a belief that is non-essential to the gospel and our unity as covenant members. Is the earth young because it was made in 144 hours? Is the earth old because God allowed it to evolve? If you want my personal opinion, or that of any of the pastors, please ask us. But rather than demanding the same answer from everyone, we will instead encourage and celebrate our unity in a diversity of conclusions that have come from wrestling with God's word and God's world.

With that said, we do find it essential to the gospel and our unity as covenant members to affirm that God is our Creator. That is the undeniably clear message from Genesis 1 thus far. And it will only become clearer as we move forward. So let's look at the day two of creation together in verses 6-8:

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. Genesis 1:6-8

Again, we see that God speaks things into being with his Word, and separates things to put more of the chaos into order. Remember, he's already resolved the darkness dividing it from light. Now he's going to resolve the watery abyss by dividing it from itself. How he does it seems to be by putting what has historically been referred to as a "firmament" in the middle of it. This "expanse" seems to have been the big sky between the waters of earth and the clouds above it.

Although the exact nature of the expanse isn't clear, what is clear is God's power over all it. Once again, he names it like a pet: 'You will be called Heaven.' And the significance here is that the heavens don't command God—as was commonly believed among the pagans who surrounded the people of Israel; but God commanded the heavens.²⁶

On to the day three, in verses 9-13:

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Wenham, 78-79; Ross, Loc 1186-1189, 1192-1195

¹¹ And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. Genesis 1:9-13

Now we’re really getting the rhythm of things. This time God speaks into being the seas and land, and he gives them definition by separating them. In order for this part of the chaos to be put into order, the water is given boundaries that it cannot pass. This is the ultimate Gandalf move, right—‘Water, you shall not pass!’ But before we laugh this off, the Bible gives serious attention to the reality that God put boundaries on the seas.²⁷ Why? Because imagine how horrifying and inescapable an ocean with no boundaries! I don’t know about you, but even just the thought of a tsunami makes me want to move to the mountains. And yet God tells the ocean to sit and stay, like a dog. Why? Because order is necessary for life.

In fact, it’s on this day that we see an even deeper measure of order, as there are divisions within the divisions, and countless kinds of vegetation begin to sprout, some seed-bearing and some fruit-bearing. Why? Because order is necessary for life. For ages to come it would remind God’s people to receive the gracious harvests of him who created and maintained fertility, not try to manipulate some pagan gods into throwing them scraps to fight over.²⁸

Now to day four, in verses 14-19:

¹⁴ 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, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. Genesis 1:14-19

²⁷ Exodus 14:27-28; Job 38:10-11; Proverbs 8:29; Psalm 33:7, 65:5-7, 89:8-9, 104:9; Jeremiah 5:22; Matthew 8:25-27

²⁸ Wenham, 79-80; Ross, Loc 1197-1198, 1202-1208

This day God speaks into being the sun, moon, and stars, which brings about the distinctions of day and night and season and calendar. Here we find that the author once again provides more detail than usual. Why? Probably because of how common it was (and still is) for people to worship these amazing lights as gods themselves. Just think of how normal it is in our scientifically enlightened society for people to suppose blessings or omens from the sun, moon, and stars. Now imagine how much more so for pagans without access to the developments of science or realities of Genesis! And this is probably the reason why God isn't recorded as giving names to them like usual. Although mind-blowing and glorious to man, they are merely nameless servants of their all-glorious Creator. In considering them we are certainly to be led to worship—not *them*, but the *One who made them*.²⁹

This brings us to the fifth day, in verses 20-23:

²⁰ 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." ²¹ 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. ²² And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. Genesis 1:20-23

This day God speaks into being animals of the sea and sky, once again giving birth to the divisions of countless kinds. Two things stand out.

One, among the divisions, one special kind of creature is singled out: the great sea creatures. Throughout the Bible, these terrifying creatures are given attention, and almost always in the context of God alone creating and subduing them. They were (and still are) meant to inspire worship toward their Master, not worship toward them.³⁰

The second thing that stands out is for the first time we see God blessing a part of his creation, and saying to it, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill". Blessing will be a theme that we track closely as we journey throughout Genesis. In the terminology of our day it would be like saying, "Go be successful"—except that when God says it, he actually has the ability to provide the success, to cause the blessing to bear fruit in and through his creatures. God's good order not only sustains life, it multiplies it.³¹

²⁹ Wenham, 80-81; Ross, Loc 1214-1221

³⁰ Ross, Loc 1223-1227

³¹ Wenham, 84-85

On to day six, in verses 24-31:

²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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. Genesis 1:24-31

We will pause here just long enough to note that God begins by bringing into being land animals in three categories: domestic, wild, and small animals.³²

²⁶ 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.”

*²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. Genesis 1:26-27*

But here, ladies and gentlemen, the rhythm changes dramatically. There are so many differences, in fact, that we can't deny God has reached his crowning point of creation: a man and a woman.

As he speaks of them, interestingly he does so in the plural. Is this a reference to the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, this early in the Bible? Well, according to what we know from the rest of the Scriptures, yes, God is a triune God, and so we can interpret the Trinity at work here. However, it's not likely that would've been fully clear to the author of Genesis. It could've been a plural of majesty, which would make sense in light of the majestic work the King of Kings was completing.³³

The man and woman are to be made in God's image and likeness. This doesn't seem to be referring to the man and woman physically looking like God since God is a non-created Spirit. More likely, they reflected him in that they could have a soulful relationship with him and one another. But not only that, they were to be God's representatives on the earth, ruling as God's viceroys, maintaining the good order that sustains life. And they were not only to avoid causing things to return to chaos, they were to pursue causing the good order to multiply life. And so in order for them to fulfill

³² Wenham, 86

³³ Ross, Loc 1234-1237

that divine intention, God created them not only in his own image, but he created them male and female.³⁴

This theme carries on in verse 28:

²⁸ 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.” ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ 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. Genesis 1:28-30

According to God’s design, without a male and female, his intentions for the good of humanity and the world would not be possible. There would be no soulful relating, no ruling over the earth to sustain the good order, and no multiplication of that good order. The amazing privileges that God crowns the man and woman with, he crowns with complete mutuality. One is not more valuable than the other in fulfilling the mandate.³⁵ And the social wars and mass confusion over gender are not the way things were meant to be—and that’s why they feel like chaos and disorder, and why soulful relationships between men and women individually and collectively are complicated and painful. But we need this Genesis 1 vision if we are to have any hope of things being different among God’s people—we can’t just start in Genesis 3.

The world as God intended it was a man and a woman as distinct (remember, that’s not bad, that good). So think of it like a pyramid, the man here and the woman here and God their Creator at the top. If either of their focus becomes only toward one another, there is no movement toward one another. But the more they set their eyes on their Creator and draw near to him, the closer they come to one another.

And again, this is sparked by a Genesis 1 vision, the vision that God himself saw and said,

it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Genesis 1:31

³⁴ Ross, Loc 1239-1249; Wenham, 94

³⁵ Wenham, 95-96

The more literal translation here would be, “and behold, it was really very good.” As God looked at the fullness of his creative work, he was rightly impressed.³⁶ Out of a dark, watery chaos, he had established a perfect world by his Word. God, is Lord.

3) God is Savior—He Blessed His Creation to Share His Rest

And yet, not only does the opening of Genesis tells us he is Creator and Lord, but he is also Savior. This bring us to the final reality about him from today’s passage: he blessed his creation to share his rest. The creation account concludes in the first three verses of chapter 2, saying:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. Genesis 2:1-3

Here, on the seventh day, the rhythm of creating and then evaluating has come to an end. Instead there is finishing, ceasing, blessing, and sanctifying. Everything about these three verses, from their content to their structure, points to the perfect completion of creation; most notably, that this is the seventh day, the number seven being constantly used throughout the Bible as perfect and complete, as the divine number.

What goes hand in hand with this idea of completeness is rest. This begins with God himself laying down his creative work, and resting. But it’s not the kind of where God is exhausted and collapses on the couch. It carries the sense of ceasing, of being still and quiet, of stopping to enjoy the accomplishment, to celebrate and admire. The New Testament equivalent is when we read that after his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. This ain’t no Lazy-boy. He’s still ruling the world, still dispensing the benefits of his finished work to his beloved creation.

And what he learn from verse 3 is that God then blesses and sanctifies the seventh day, meaning it made ripe to be shared with his creatures, and the goodness of it multiplied. This is the first blessing in Genesis that is applied not to animate beings, but inanimate thing, like a day. The idea is that those who will observe this holy day, this Sabbath will reap divine blessing from it. This would be true for God’s OT people, and it’s still true for God NT people. Not in our culture’s understanding of sabbath...but in our ceasing and soulful relating to God and to others and to his world.³⁷

³⁶ Wenham, 97

³⁷ Ross, Loc 1097-1101, 1255-1263; Kidner, 57; Wenham, 99

But it's more than this for God's NT people, it's an invitation into rest not for a day, but for all of eternity, by ceasing our labor of trying to please God on our own, and trusting in his Son, Jesus Christ. It's not just the rest that comes from creation, but that which comes from a new creation. You see, this is why we intentionally use the uncomfortable word "chaos" in the description of this account of creation. It's because it allows us to see that God is revealing himself from the very beginning, even before Genesis 3, as not just Creator or Lord, but Savior. He blesses his creation to share his rest.

Conclusion

On the corner of Muhammad Ali and Fourth Street in downtown Louisville you'll find a historic marker. It tells the story of a spiritual revelation experienced there by famous Trappist monk, Thomas Merton. According to Merton, on March 18, 1958, "in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers...There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun." That marked the moment in Merton's life where he turned from merely pursuing a spiritual life as a world-denying monk, and began pursuing a soulful life as a world-embracing monk. His head remained in the clouds of glorious truths about God, but his feet became more firmly planted on the gritty realities of the earth.³⁸

Now, I don't tell that story to commend you to go down to Muhammad Ali and Fourth and be like Thomas Merton. I tell it because, as celebrated as that story is as a great spiritual revelation, I think if you're reading Genesis right, you'll be led to the same experience, whether you're in downtown Louisville or not.

Understanding who God is, and who we are in light of him, doesn't begin in Genesis 3, but Genesis 1. There, we have seen realities that inform all of life for all people in all times: God, by his powerful Word, transforms chaos into a holy creation meant to be with him. This was true for God's Old Testament people, who were rescued from the dark and chaotic world of slavery in Egypt and given rest with God in the land of promise. And this is also true for God's New Testament people, who have been rescued from the dark and chaotic world of slavery to sin and are already experiencing rest with

³⁸ The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, "Thomas Merton Square," <http://merton.org/TMSQ.aspx>

God through Jesus Christ.³⁹ Even in Genesis 1, as far away from the New Testament as you can get, all signs are pointing at this glorious reality:

⁶ For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:6

What’s left unanswered in Genesis 1 doesn’t matter in light of this great answer. What is God doing in the middle of my darkness and chaos?! That’s what we come into a place like this asking. He’s doing what he’s been doing from day one of this whole thing, he’s speaking light and order into being through his living Word, Jesus Christ. It was *him* who entered into the darkness, but the darkness did not enter into him—or to use the Bible’s language, the darkness did not overcome him.⁴⁰ *His* body was ripped to shreds and made whole again, unmade and remade, dead and risen, so that you could experience the same new creation through him. How can you trust that Jesus Christ is willing to enter into and maintain that soulful, re-creative work with you? Because that’s who he is, and that’s who he’s been from the beginning. Hear his voice as he speaks of himself in the book of Proverbs as the wisdom of God:

*²² “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of old.
²³ Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
²⁶ before he had made the earth with its fields,
or the first of the dust of the world.
²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸ when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman,*

³⁹ Ross, Loc 1263-1273

⁴⁰ John 1:5

*and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
³¹rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man. Proverbs 8:22-31*

No wonder he rejoices to be “the source and perfecter of our faith, [the one] who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne.”⁴¹ Because he was Creator, Lord, and Savior from the beginning, he is Creator, Lord, and Savior to the end.

As a soulful way to remind us how heaven's glories met earth's grit, on the night that he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and said to his disciples, “This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he returns.” **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ is the fountain of life, and his light do we see light.**⁴²

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let's pray.

⁴¹ Hebrews 12:2, HCSB

⁴² Psalm 36:9

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