

***Foundations: Life!***  
***By Jason Huff***  
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***Psalm 148; Mark 2:23-28; Genesis 1:20-2:3***

Friends, we continue our reading in the first chapter of Genesis, Genesis 1:20-2:3. May God bless the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning – the fifth day. And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Then God said, “I give you 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. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day. 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; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

Life is all around us! We live in an industrial bubble in Detroit, right? We live on the far northeastern edge of Metro Detroit, suburbia, a good six or seven miles from anything remotely starting to look like a rural area. And yet we see deer, rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, opossum, foxes, on occasion coyotes, not to mention cats and dogs. Also not to mention all the countless varieties of birds that migrate through here. Because our home happens to sit on a stretch of wooded area in the midst of the city, we see more of them than some of you might. And yet we come across it all the time, even outside our backyard. In the suburban jungle, we’re still teaming with it. And that doesn’t even mention the people!

Life is at the core of days five, six, and seven of creation. Life, brought by God, empowered by God, made by God, explains the purpose to the universe created in the first four days. All of this was created to support life. The later three days that we’re going to talk about today show us even more about our Creator God and establish key foundations that Christians believe about the world we live in.

Before we do that, I want to review some things we learned in the first four days of creation. Many of them appear in the last three days too, so by reviewing, we'll make sure that we don't miss them. We learned last week that Genesis 1 is far more about our Creator than the creation itself. We learned that God existed before His creation and is completely distinct from His creation. God brings order and stability. God has no rival or equal. The creation is good. And finally, we learned that Jesus is our creator just as much as the Father and the Spirit. There was a lot packed into those first few days. Let's see what unfolds in the next three days.

Day five brings the first animals into creation. God starts, we're told, with the creatures in the sea and in the air. Then in day six, He makes all the land animals and then finishes off His divine work with the creation of humanity.

I'm going to talk about the things that strike me in the passage, and I'm going to start with the teeming seas and skies. Why does this tell us about God? I think it's this: *God is an abundant God who creates in abundance and gives in abundance.* One of the things that bugs me about the idea of evolution – not micro-evolution, not tiny changes over time that occur that we can see and document with science, but macro-evolution, the theory that all the different creatures we have on earth evolve from microbes and earlier forms of life over billions of years – is that it doesn't explain the magnificent variety and sheer numbers of animal forms on the planet. It doesn't mean God couldn't have done it that way, but from Genesis, we get the sense that all at once, the seas and the air are swarming with creatures. Big ones, small ones, all kinds. God continues to create magnificence that just wasn't there before.

The abundance of God is so clear here. It's not just a pair or two, the ancestor of the salmon and the ancestor of the finch, but many, many, numbers upon numbers, swelling, swarming, everywhere you look, where once there was nothing, there is now life! God didn't go small. It's lost a little bit in the English translation, but God is creating the leviathans of the deep. The word in Hebrew is *tannin*, which in various places in Hebrew is the dragon or sea monster or sea serpent. The great and terrible creatures of the sea that the earliest Hebrews so feared were not gods themselves, as the cultures around them believed. They were part of God's abundant creation, subservient to Him.

God's abundance is something we really need to remember today. God is a gracious giver of good gifts, Jesus reminds us in Matthew 7:11. In Psalm 50, God tells His people that He doesn't need their gifts; "the world is mine," He says, "every animal of the forest and the cattle on a thousand hills belongs to me. I know every bird in the mountains." He is not out of funds. He is not out of ways to help you. He isn't in heaven wondering how He's going to fulfill all His promises. He can help you abundantly.

This isn't the abundance promised by the televangelists of big homes and cars, an abundance of worldly prosperity that could be a curse, that could cause a downfall into sin. No, God has everything you need. Do you need healing? Ask God for it, and ask us to ask on your behalf too. Do you need money to make rent, to get to work, to feed your family? Ask God for it, and ask us to ask on your behalf too. God made the world in abundance and He has an abundance to give to you what you truly need. You can rely on Him who made not just a microbe that would one day turn into a bird, but who made the air and sky teem with every kind.

Moving on to the second thought: *God blesses life*. God blesses life. Let's take a moment to figure out what that really means. We sneeze, someone says, "God bless you." We don't like something someone says, we're trying not to be cruel about it, especially if you're southern, we say, "Bless your heart." Every week, our church service ends with a benediction, a blessing. But what does that mean?

At its root, a blessing is words and actions of favor. When God blesses, He's bestowing His divine favor, He's speaking His divine support, His divine promise, on something or someone. While we can bless people – we can curse people, too – our words don't have much meaning. But God's blessing matters. God's blessing speaks to His radical love for that which He blessed. Even the birds and fish and land creatures, tiny minds, no understanding like human understanding, they are pronounced loved and favored by God.

God shows particular favor to human life. We talked last week how creation is good. But God doesn't deem creation "very good" until after humanity enters the scene. Humanity is the crowning jewel of His handiwork, God's *piece de resistance*, His masterpiece of creation. We'll talk more about that in a minute. But life, especially human life, is blessed. The physical components of creation, the earth, the heavens, the sun and stars, the vegetation, they aren't specifically blessed. But life is. There is a sense that life, all human and animal life, is sacred. It matters deeply to God. In Luke 12:6-7, Jesus tells us that we matter so much more than five sparrows sold for a few cents – and yet, not a single sparrow is forgotten by God either.

This is why we as Christians respect life so thoroughly, particularly human life. It's why I work at Compassion Pregnancy Center, to help save children from abortion. From the conception of life to its natural end, Christians see life as sacred, blessed before God. Even though animal life has a different value, we don't willfully destroy it without purpose either. God specifically loves those He has given life, and humanity most of all. His blessing is on us now, even after our fall into sin. In spite of our rebellion and treason, God shows us great patience and kindness that demonstrate that blessing. For those who believe and trust in Christ, the blessing is all the more demonstrated through the love He had for us by sending Jesus to take the punishment we rightfully deserved and bringing us into His Kingdom through His Son.

Another concept we need to touch on: *the ambiguity of the plural language for God in creation gives us our first hints of the triune nature of God*. Repeatedly in the Old Testament, God tells the people of Israel that He is the only true God. The *shema*, the first prayer almost every Jewish person ever learns, is "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." It's very clear that Judaism is monotheistic – one God. Ancient Jewish commentators had to really work through the implications when God says, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness."

Those commentators typically suggested that God was using the plural as royalty, as kings are want to do in many societies. It's regal language. There was the suggestion that perhaps God was speaking to a royal court, announcing the creation of humanity to the angels. Yet God wasn't making humanity like the angels; He was making humanity like Himself. No one ever arrived at an unshakable answer.

This is why many Christians – and I’m one of them – believe that God was starting to reveal His triune nature even at the very beginning. The first verses of Scripture tell us not only of God but also of God’s Spirit hovering over the waters of the unfinished creation. God never lived when He said He was one God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three gods. They are one God in three persons so utterly united in thought, will, and purpose that they are a trinity – literally, a tri-unity. The ancient Jews wouldn’t have seen it this way, but God leaves hints of His further revelation to come all along the way. Make no doubt – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all deeply and intimately engaged with the act of creation, and that becomes apparent when they together decide to make humankind.

There’s so much more here, more than we can possibly cover. Another thing, super important, maybe the most important piece yet: *we are uniquely made in the image of God*. What does this mean, exactly? It’s another area of debate, because the Bible does not spell it out for us. But there are several ways that humans are different from the rest of the forms of life spelled out in the creation, different in ways that reflect God Himself.

Humans are moral creatures. Even now, in a world that has rejected much of biblical teaching, we speak about ethics and morality. Cultures that know nothing of Christianity know of ethics and morality. God made us as beings with a moral core. We have wills. We are not driven by instinct but by reasoning. We have the capacity for godliness, for righteousness, for obedience to God, that literally makes no sense for any other creatures. Being made in the image of God doesn’t mean we resemble Him in some physical way, for God is spirit. It means that resemble Him in spirit – that we are spiritual creatures, meant to be like Him in will and purpose and holiness. When we live as Jesus did, we become mirrors of the personal traits of God.

We haven’t gotten to the topic of sin yet – we will in a couple of weeks – but we understand that the image of God in humankind has been damaged, marred, and scarred. Yet that image still remains. If you will, we are cracked mirrors. Even when we come into the faith, come to belief, and are saved through Christ, even when the mirror is repaired, the cracks are less visible, but they’re still there. We believe, however, that when we who are believers are resurrected in the presence of God, that image will finally be fully restored. We will become again who we were made to be. We honor all life because it is blessed by God, but we especially protect and defend human life because we are made in God’s image and, at our very best, when the Holy Spirit is doing His work in us, we reflect Him.

Bringing up that issue of sin makes us aware of another key element we see in the passage: *death was not originally part of creation*. When God tells humanity what it can eat, He says every seed bearing plant and fruit is for us. All the green plants are meant for the animals. There are no carnivores at the beginning. I may love eating a hamburger myself, but that wasn’t always the way of things. Because creation in its complete, unsoiled state had no death.

This isn’t mean to make us all into vegans or vegetarians. God later establishes we can eat a variety of foods, including meat and animal products. There’s nothing morally wrong with it for us. But it means that death was never intended to be with us. And it means that if death is not a natural part of life, if it isn’t a given, if it’s not supposed to be this way, then God can set things right and can create a new heaven and a new earth where sin and death have no place.

There is a time coming when death will have no victory and no sting. If death had been with us from the beginning, we would have to look at it differently. But it has no place in God's good creation. And when God brings us into the new heaven and new earth, it will become a distant memory and not a permanently reality.

Another concept we see: *we have a good job to do*. Good work, good tasks for us to accomplish, exist before the fall. I believe that good work will be a part of our eternal life because it's part of God's intention for us from the beginning. But unlike our work today – painful, sometimes meaningless, difficult, hard – this is good work, the work we were made for. And that work in this world was to fill the earth and subdue it, to have dominion over it.

The wording is not just mastery over it, like to bend it to our will. The language is royal language. It's the calling to be the kings and queens of creation. We're meant to rule it, not as harsh taskmasters but as gracious sovereigns, overseeing it, managing it wisely, using it carefully, preparing it for the generations to come, the princes and princesses to follow. When Jesus tells us that His followers will rule at His side, again, it's returning us to our intended role. Not as usurpers trying to take God's role or to overthrow His reign, but as co-regents with Jesus.

Because next week's passage talks a lot about the relationship between men and women in creation, we'll talk about it then. The last thing we want to look at is the seventh day. There's a poetic structure in the Hebrew to the finale of the passage. It's made up of three lines of seven Hebrew words, each phrase containing the word "seventh" at the center. God had completed work on the seventh day; God rested on the seventh day; God blessed the seventh day and called it holy. Throughout Scripture, seven is a figurative number meaning perfection. This is where it comes from. From creation, seven represents completion and wholeness.

God blesses the seventh day and declares it holy, a day of rest, a set-apart day. The seventh day isn't the Sabbath; there's no command to keep yet. But the seventh day holds incredible importance for us beyond the Sabbath, a holy day set apart for the Lord. And there's a reason why: *the seventh day of creation is a promise of a perfect rest in God through Christ*.

If you look carefully – I'd never noticed this before – there is a pattern missing on the seventh day. Every other pattern ends with "and there was evening and there was morning, the X day." The seventh day doesn't have this. There's no official end to the seventh day. God's rest day seems to be ongoing. As far as the pattern goes, it never stops. Jesus tells us in Mark 2 that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The holy day, the day of rest, is something God gave us not only for worship and refreshment but to point to our future rest.

The book of Hebrews chapter 4 talks about how even now, even after the pattern of the Jewish sabbath is gone, there is a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. The promise of rest, shown on the seventh day of creation, still stands. For all who believe, who all who cling tightly to Jesus, an eternal rest is coming. Not sleep, not a momentary pause before returning to the rat race, but a genuine, eternal rest. A rest that we will enjoy even as we do the work God calls us to do in His eternal Kingdom. Being with God, alive in His presence, enjoying His love and returning His love – that will be wonderful, and it will be a true eternal rest from all of the sorrows and trials of this world.

There is so much in this passage, I probably could have given it an extra week. I've given us a lot to think about. But know these things: God is a God of abundance who has abundance for all our needs. God loves life and blesses life and calls us to do the same. We are made in the image of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who we first see hinted at here in Genesis 1. Because death has no hold on us as Christians, we are assured that we can do the good work of the Kingdom God has called us to, and in our wonderful Jesus, we will find rest for our souls both now and evermore.