

September 2, 2018

Lesson 1: God Created The Heavens and The Earth

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-13

Context:

Our new series for the fall season *God's World and God's People* takes us to the beginning of the Bible. Over the next few months we will explore the book of Genesis and the inherent goodness in God's creation. The first unit focuses on God creating the world down to every minute detail from creation of the solar system to humanity.

The first lesson begins with the opening words of chapter one, perhaps some of the most important in scripture. Reflecting some of the creation and cosmology stories of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the creation story affirms that there is a God who is in control of the world.¹ God has made everything with nothing left to human imagination: the heavens, the solar system, the earth, and all the inhabitants of the earth. All of it is a good thing as there is a refrain after each day with that very message: "God saw how good it was." Each and every thing has its place.

The text though did not appear out of nowhere. Most scholars date this creation story to the sixth century B.C.. The audience was probably Babylonian exiles.² At the time, the Babylonian gods seemed to control the future as the Israelites found themselves in a foreign land.³ Thus, this text was a word of hope to the Israelites. God had not abandoned them and God could be trusted regardless of the situation in which the Israelites found themselves.

Thus, this text is to be seen not as a formula that God followed in creating the world with a focus on the number of days and how everything was accomplished. Instead of seeing this text as a scientific description, we are to read it as a theological affirmation, a faith statement.⁴ We are reminded that God designed the world and was faithful to make each thing good. To attempt to see how it fits a number of days or that it means the world is only a few thousand years old limits the power of the text, as well as God. The point is missed of God being the great designer of the universe and the fact that God is so incredible that human terms cannot even begin to comprehend the ability of God.

Instead we are given a glimpse of all the things that we know and experience. Humans have seen the beauty of the heavens with the stars. We have seen the moonlight bounce off the wide spread of the ocean. We have experienced being able to see clearly in the light and even the darkness that comes when there are clouds and no stars. We have experienced the earth and come across the diverse greenery that surrounds us. As the

¹ Walter Brueggeman, "Genesis," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1982), 24.

² Ibid., 25.

³ Ibid., 25.

⁴ Ibid., 25.

Israelites would have reflected on this text, they would have remembered that God was in the midst of all those things even as they felt alone in a foreign land.

Application

As I read this text, I couldn't help but smile thinking of all the times I have read this passage and reflected on: "In the beginning..." Growing up, listening to the creation stories was one of my favorite things to do. As my mother would read the story, I could see each thing happening. The wind coming over the water, volcanoes erupting to give birth to land, greenery spreading all around, and in the midst of it all, God says that it was good.

I think that is the beauty of this text. Instead of trying to analyze how it all came together, perhaps we are simply to marvel at the fact that God created the world in mysterious ways we will never understand. Debates about the number of days or how old the world is supposed to be doesn't help us hear the good news in this text. In fact we miss the point when we try to do so.

Instead, we are encouraged to sit and be at awe. We can go for a walk in nature and marvel at how each plant is so unique right down to the variations in leaf color. We can look up at the sky and marvel at deep blue in the day and the countless stars we see at night. We can go out on the water and imagine the depth and widespread nature of the ocean. We can go to different parts of the world and see every type of terrain imaginable: beaches, mountains, glaciers, savannahs, deserts, plains, and jungles. All of them were created by God and are incredible.

The creation story also reminds us that the natural earth is a good thing and is to be appreciated as such. The land is not just something that humans are to use for their own benefit. The land is something to be respected and honored as it reflects the handiwork of God. The same goes for the skies and the oceans. These are things created by God that are to remind humans that they are good things and not just for our pleasure.

How will you look around today and every day and give thanks to God for creation? Will you enjoy it and treasure it? Here we are reminded that God has made everything we come into contact with daily and that we are to pause in awestruck wonder. For God made it and it was very good.

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