

WHEN GOD SPEAKS
Genesis 1:1-2:3

Dr. Howard Batson
First Baptist Church
Amarillo, Texas
September 25, 2022

Before the beginning of the beginning of anything that ever was, there was God and there was nothing. The emptiness was emptier than anyone could imagine, so God began to speak. God began to tell the story from which the very universe emerged.

And God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light.

There used to be an old commercial for the investment firm of E. F. Hutton. E. F. Hutton is remembered mostly for its catchy advertising slogan. “When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen.” The commercials would show people stopping whatever they were doing the moment someone would casually say, “Well, my broker is E. F. Hutton, and he says...”

Well, it may or not have been true that when E. F. Hutton talks, people listen. But I can say with full confidence that when God talks, things happen – whether people listen or not.

I. When God speaks, things happen.

The very cosmos was called out of chaos by “thus sayeth the Lord.” “Let there be” – and there was. And it was good. In fact, as you look at Genesis 1, there is only one person talking in the entire chapter, and that person is God. It’s not a dialogue. It’s a monologue. And God alone takes the stage and spotlight. And even man, created with a tongue that he, too, could speak, does not speak back to God in Genesis 1. In this beautiful story of creation, the chaos of nothing becomes the symphony of everything, as each and every day God speaks, “Let there be...” – and there is. In fact, if you look at the number of times that God speaks in Genesis 1, you realize that this creation saga is about a speaking God.

Look at verse 3.

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

Verse 6.

Then God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters....”

Verse 9

Then God said, “Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so.

Verse 11

Then God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with seed in them, on the earth”; and it was so.

God speaks and things happen.

Verses 14-15

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night...and it was so.

Verse 20

Then God said, “Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens.”

Verse 24

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind”; and it was so.

Verse 26

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;”

Verse 29

Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you....”

When God speaks, it is so. In fact, speaking is the defining characteristic of God in chapter 1. Genesis 1 is about the story telling, or speaking, God. So many times when someone preaches from Genesis 1, you hear about anything and everything. But no one addresses the speaker of the text.

When God speaks, things happen.

God is the chief actor of Genesis 1. In fact, it all begins properly with verse 1, “In the beginning God...” The very words of God transform chaos into the cosmos, turn darkness into light, and alter that which was of nothing into that which was good, holy, and worthy of God’s blessing.

The speech of God is a sovereign call. The speaking of God is not a subject open to debate. His words are sure to have their own way. Clearly, the creation will be God’s creation for, you see, God Himself has called the creation into being. Paul reflects on this in Romans 4:17. “as it is written, ‘... God...gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.’”

Peter, like Paul, says it in 2 Peter 3:5. “...by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water.”

In fact, in Isaiah 55:11, God says, “So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I send it.”

II. God and His creation are distinct and yet, inextricably, linked.

First of all, the distinction. Have you ever noticed that when humankind veers off-track in history, we’ve usually failed to make the distinction between Creator and creation? Most of our problems are related to the moment when we confuse creation for Creator.

God alone is Creator. He alone decided to create. He could have decided not to create anything, to allow Himself to just move over the surface of the formless void. When man begins to worship creation, we have confusion. Throughout history, men have worshipped the sun, the moon, the stars, animals – be it a sacred cow or a holy hippo. In short, everything that pagans have worshipped are things that God has made. Consequently, those gods pose no threat to the God, to our God, for He, Himself, has formed them by his own hand.

Yes, most of our problems occur when we confuse Creator with creation, when we, ourselves, try to play the role of the Creator, life-giver. For example, when we seek to re-define the beginning or ending of life – be it abortion, euthanasia, or suicide, we are pretending to be the Creator rather than creation.

But not only are the Creator and creation distinct, they are also inextricably linked. They are together. Creator and creation are, indeed, in relationship. God and His creation are bound together in a distinctive and delicate way. That’s the presupposition of everything that follows in the Bible. God created and God loves His creation. And it’s only from this premise that God the Creator loves His creation that there is any good news in the person of Christ Jesus, who comes to redeem not only humankind but, ultimately, all of His creation.

God will have a faithful relationship with earth. The binding is irreversible. God has already decided it and the connection cannot be nullified.

Paul says in Romans that this fallen creation groans. “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” It’s all of God’s creation that longs to be released from the powers of sin and corruption.

III. What God created is good and worthy to be blessed.

No less than six times, God judges His creation as “good.” And finally, in a triumphant seventh time (the number of completion), God says that, in fact, it is “very good.”

Look at verse 4.

And God saw that the light was good

Or verse 10

... and God saw that it was good.

Or verse 12

...God saw that it was good.

Again in verse 18 and 21 and 25. And finally, when God surveys all that He has done, he says in verse 31 (the last verse of the chapter), “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”

The sun, the moon, and the sea monsters – all of Genesis 1 – are part of God’s very good creation. Whether it was the grass, the earth, or the myriad of galaxies, God looked at all that God had done and God said they were all that He wanted them to be. They were very good.

IV. Humankind holds a special place in God’s creation.

I wonder if you’ve ever noticed it before. This story-telling God, this speaking God who is the only character to utter a word in this chapter, speaks directly only to human creatures. The other creatures have little (v. 22) or no speech directed toward them. But in 1:28f., God speaks to humanity. He addresses them twice, directly: “You.” This crowning creature has a different, intimate relation with the Creator. God has made a particularly intense commitment to this creature – to humankind – by speaking to him. And marvelous freedom was given to this creature in his and her ability to respond. God, no less, equipped men and women to function as His agents on earth. Humankind, as created by God, is a glorious creature, beautiful in form, lordly in dominion over the earth, and favored in relationship to Creator.

And this much seems certain. Man was to have a directive role over creation. When it says that God gives human beings dominion over the freshly created world and commands that they subdue it, the verb used here is a very forceful one meaning to tread on grapes, as in Joel 3:13, or to dominate an enemy in war, as in Numbers 24:19 or Psalm 72:8-9. Humans were to have a clear and active role as stewards of creation.

It does seem only fitting that as stewards of the great creation of God, we’re to take care of the earth – not to destroy it. We are to be stewards of the earth for the long-term good for all of humanity and all of creation. And yet, it is not the tree or the bird or even the lion who is to have dominion over the earth. It is humankind.

There is another thing I want you to notice in verse 27. Gender distinction is part of God’s creation. He created them male and female. The greatest argument against same-gender sexuality is that it goes against the created order of God. Paul argues this much in Romans 1. The human person is ordained by God to be male and female. And sexuality is good and is ordained by God as part of the creation. “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth,” he says to the man and the woman.

Humanity was not created as some sort of androgynous, genderless being. We are created as male and female. Gender is determined by chromosomes (XX female, XY male). No amount of rhetoric redefining gender for political purposes cancels the basic biology of chromosomes and hormones. And maleness and femaleness are both part of God-imagery.

To try to convince girls they have to be boys to have true value undermines the value of womanhood as part of God's creation. We have a spike in adolescent females seeking to identify as boys. They need to hear that femaleness is valued as part of God's good creation. They, too, are made in God's image.

Even this week, the Wall Street Journal published an article entitled, "Every Tomboy Tagged as Transgender" (WSJ 9/22/2022). The article describes that the transgender movement is demanding a very narrow definition of womanhood, saying every athletic girl must surely be transgender. The transgender movement espouses a narrow definition of womanhood which is a stereotype of yester-year. Confused girls are surgically and pharmaceutically butchered to fulfill someone's political or profit agenda. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health says start early – 14 years of age to be on hormones and 15 for surgery.

The girls must know that they are loved as they are, as women.

And heterosexuality is no less grounded in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible and the very creating command of God. He created them, male and female, and told them to be fruitful and multiply.

V. God rested on the seventh day.

Look at chapter 2.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

The original Sabbath in Israel was a day of rest.

The Sabbath announces our faith in God and a rejection of all other gods, religions, and world views. When we rest on the Sabbath day, when we make it a day to worship Him, we are saying that we trust God. God, Himself, is confident enough to stop toiling for one day, and so can we. Life in the here and now does not depend upon our feverish activity of self-security. Rather, there can be a weekly pause in the rhythm on the seventh day because life is a gift from the Creator.

When you and I treat the day of worship and rest as any other day – in New Testament language, Sunday – then we are fundamentally failing to acknowledge God as Creator. For the Creator Himself set the pattern and commands His people to rest.

When we rest on the Sabbath we indicate that we're setting aside the tyranny of the urgent of the moment and recapturing the stability and the equilibrium that God established when He so ordered the cosmos.

Don't you see where the whole narrative is going? The creation of humankind on the sixth day is not the end of the story. And the seventh day is not an "add-on" expression. Rather, the creation of humankind on the sixth day is but an introduction to the conclusion of the whole creation. It is

the seventh day that is blessed and sanctified because it is there that we find out that God has set up the whole cosmos of creation so that it will serve as His temple.

In fact, the idea of all creation being a temple is seen in Isaiah 66:1, which says the heaven is God's throne and the earth is God's footstool, providing a resting place for Him. And when God finds His resting place, it's the equivalent of being enthroned by all creation – taking up His role as sovereign ruler over the cosmos. The Tabernacle and Temple are simply symbols of the reality of this concept (see Psalm 104:2-4).

Sabbath means God has taken His place at the helm. And when we stop and rest and worship Him on that day, we acknowledge Him – and only then do we acknowledge Him – for who He is. The psalmist says in Psalm 104 that God covers Himself with light as His cloak. He stretches out heaven like a tent curtain. He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters. He makes the clouds His chariot and walks upon the wings of the wind. He makes the winds His messengers, and flaming fire His ministers. He established the earth upon its foundations, so that it will not totter forever and ever.

Have you ever watched a bald eagle catch a rising thermal and glide totally out of sight without ever flapping a wing? How did he learn to do that? Those who have watched it call it one of the most awe-inspiring events that one could possibly behold.

Ever sit and observe a garden spider construct its web from scratch? You can't help but know that an amazingly creative God has given it the incredible instinct to spiral inward in an intricate pattern that is duplicated perfectly each time it builds a new web.

Ever sit in the absolute, total darkness of a cave? So dark that you can feel it. So dark that you are afraid to move even a foot for fear of falling. So dark, yet you listen to the high pitched chirping of bats as they effortlessly negotiate the cavernous spaces – their echo – location capabilities so finely tuned that they are able to tell where they are in the cave and return each dawn to the same roosting spot.

Ever laid on your back for hours into the night in West Texas, where no city lights adulterate the sky? Watching the full measure of the glory of the heavens as the stars shine with such brilliance as to shout. The Milky Way is so spectacular and seems a solid river of light gently flowing from horizon to horizon. It makes you stand in awe of God's personal love. Comparing yourself to the expanding universe, yet God knows you personally and wants you to know Him.

Ever hike the Rocky Mountains with a backpack and absorb the evergreen-laden air and felt the crisp freshness of the dawn as the sun slowly revealed its face over the peak? Standing at the edge of the year-round snow field on the peak in the middle of July and seeing the beautiful verdant valley below, laced with streams meandering across the meadow.

Ever hear a baby's rhythmic giggle the very first time he discovers the wet nose of a playful pup?

As the psalmist of old has already declared, "O Lord, how many are thy works! In wisdom, thou hast made them all; the earth is full of Thy possessions.... Let the Lord be glad in His works; He

looks at the earth, and it trembles; I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.”

Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.