

The Goodness of Creation

Genesis 1

INTRODUCTION

About a month ago, Major League Baseball had an opportunity to host a professional baseball game in a remote, small farming town called Dyersville, Iowa. This was the first MLB game ever played in Iowa, and its intent was to recreate the beauty and simplicity of the game as presented in the 1989 classic, "Field of Dreams." In this movie, the main character, Ray, is a farmer in rural Iowa who, while out in the cornfields one day, hears a voice, "If you build it, he will come." What he realizes he must build is a baseball field and the person who is supposed to come is a young, spry version of his dad. Sadly, Ray never knew his dad as one filled with innocence, purity, and a love for life. This is because his dad overtime had been worn down by the hardships of life. After Ray had finished the ballpark (which was gloriously beautiful!), spending all his money to do so, baseball players of many days past began showing up on the field, one of which was his dad! Upon realizing who this was on his ball field, Ray approaches his dad for a conversation. As they talk, Ray's dad is overcome by the beauty, purity, and innocence found in playing the game of baseball for the past few days on that field, to the point that he finally says to Ray, ***"It's so beautiful here, it's like a dream come true." Then he continues, "Can I ask you something? Is this heaven?"***

You see, Major League Baseball wanted to host a game that recaptured this scene of heavenly beauty ***because they realized how easy it is to move beyond it (like Ray's dad) to the business of money-making, the busyness of life, and the burdens that way us all down.*** I can relate because I myself grew up playing baseball. There was a field in a park just 6 houses down from mine, and I grew up playing there with my friends almost every day of summer! As I think back on those memories, I find them sentimental because there was a free and fun-loving joy that came with playing the game. ***The MLB recreated this game from Field of Dreams in the belief that inherent in the simplicity of baseball was something so beautiful and innocent that maybe it was "heaven-like."***

I have to admit that as I myself watched that game on tv, I too was captivated into saying, “Wow isn’t this scene beautiful. This is what baseball is supposed to be like. It’s what I remember from my childhood.”

Going beyond baseball to the world at large, I think all of us have a similar sentiment regarding the sight of something captivating: **“Wow, isn’t this beautiful! This is what the world is supposed to be like.”** I found myself saying this just this past week while at the beach. I saw a sunset that made my jaw drop. It painted the sky with color and sent reflected rays sparkled across the ebb and flow of the ocean’s waves. It was glorious and felt like a scene out of heaven. I’m sure you also can recall sights of beauty that have taken your breath away and made you conclude the same: “Wow, this is what the world is supposed to be like.”

We all need moments like this that bring us back to the beauty and goodness of creation because, quite frankly, we sometimes struggle to see the goodness in life. You see, filtered throughout the goodness of creation is the infection of sin. Sin’s effects have resulted in wars, broken relationships, suffering, sickness, suicide, sudden tragedies, murder, addiction, and many other horrible things. ***Such things have robbed the innocence, purity, and simplicity of life.***

I’m sure that for most of us, we can look back on our childhood as a simpler, more beautiful and innocent time. We think back on times past and recall them as “The good ole days.” Yet something happened as we got older. The pressures of life, the setbacks, the experiences of legitimate loss made us lose touch with the experience of “pure goodness.” Ultimately, the seduction of sin itself sucked away our ability to see and experience the world as truly good. ***Similar to the ballplayers’ need to remember the original good essence of baseball, we have a need to remember the original good essence of creation.***

My hope today in Genesis 1 is that we can go all the way back to the creation of the world to be reminded of why the creation is so good and why that matters to us today. My desire is for it to be a breath of fresh air for

us in the midst of a world filled with the smog of sin. My hope is that it allows you to gain a proper perspective on the world you see - to dissect the good from the bad, to appreciate the good and long for a new creation without the bad.

BODY

When I look at Genesis 1, what is most clear is the affirmation of the goodness of creation. We find the key refrain that runs through this passage of Scripture: ***"God saw that it was good."*** Six times, after day one (v. 4), day three (v. 10, 12), day four (v. 18), day five (v. 21), day six (v. 25) and a second time after the creation of humanity, with the addition of "very" (v. 31).

Today I want to offer five brief affirmations, or ways of thinking about the goodness of creation. What does it mean when it says, ***"And God saw that it was good"***? When we say creation is good, we mean it is (1) reflective of God, (2) conducive to life, (3) permeated with purpose, (4) enriched by beauty, and (5) clarified in Christ.

Reflective of God

First, creation is good in that creation is reflective of God. That is, creation reflects or reveals God—His nature and His character, His goodness.

In the first six days of creation, we are inundated in the detail of the creation of all things! There is the creation of the heavens and the earth, light and darkness, dry land and waters, vegetation of all kinds, all the stars, planets, and moons, all fish, birds, and land animals, and finally the creation of man himself. Yet in the midst of all this creation, we are not left wondering who the Creator is. ***Tied to every act of creation is the voice of the Creator: "And God said, 'Let there be....'"*** We could focus on the acts of creation each day, but the main emphasis is on the voice behind the acts of creation. To walk away from Genesis 1 with only an appreciation for the creation and not the Creator would be like appreciating a good meal with no thought of the chef behind it! ***Creation compels us to confess the***

Creator behind it. Genesis 1, with its constant mention of God, compels us to confess God as Creator.

There is a show on Netflix (maybe you've heard of it) called *"The World's Most Extraordinary Homes."* The show features a British architect and a British actress. Of course, they sound very smart and refined, as they travel around the world to discover these amazing architectural designs. Some of them are places you would never want to live in. They're so odd, but they are amazing, and then others are just stunning. And more often than not, they're set in some absolutely majestic, at least interesting, physical location. In one episode the hosts tour this nine bedroom house built into the side of a hill on a Greek island. They finished the segment by overlooking the sea, facing west, as they looked upon a picture-perfect sunset. The hills, the mountains, the sea crystal blue, the sun setting. And the woman says, *"I defy anyone to sit here and see this and tell me there isn't a creator behind this beauty."*

You see, she gets it! In acknowledging a good creation, she recognizes the handiwork of a good Creator. Romans 1:20 tells us we should draw the same conclusion. It says, *"For His invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made."* There should be no guesswork in God's glorious work in creation. God is behind the grandeur!

This is an exercise to train our own hearts in. We, sadly, in our mechanized and scientifically driven world, tend to sometimes see the accomplishments of man more than the creative genius of God. We can get so sucked into our work that we fail to acknowledge and appreciate God's work around us. ***Appreciating what we do makes us prideful, but appreciating what God does makes us humble.*** And oh how humbling it is to put our work next to God's infinitely superior work. You will never create a flower and scientists will never recreate an eye!

God wants us to see His creation and immediately confess His greatness. May there be no delay! John Piper says, *“If created things are seen and handled as gifts of God and as mirrors of His glory, they need not be occasions of idolatry - if our delight in them is always also a delight in their Maker.”* Our hearts should go to Him in praise when we pause to consider His creation. When we behold a good creation, our hearts should immediately say, “I have a good Father” If we stand beneath the awesome night sky, we should immediately declare, “I have an awesome God!” If we hold in our arms a beautiful newborn baby, we should immediately confess, “I have a beautiful Lord.” Creation is good in that creation is reflective of God.

Conducive to Life

The second affirmation is this: Creation is good in that creation is conducive to life.

One of the more interesting things about the opening chapter of Genesis is its structure, in terms of six days. But if you look closely, you notice the days aren't just in some linear sequence: day one, day two, day three, as though that were the only point.

No, they're carefully arranged in two groups: days one through three, and days four through six. ***On the first three days of creation, God creates habitats or environments, then on the next three days of creation, he fills these habitats or environments.*** On Day One, He creates day and night: then He fills them with heavenly lights on day four. On Day Two, He creates sky—then on day five, He fills it with birds. And last but not least, on day three, He creates the land and sea (with vegetation), and then naturally, on day six, He fills the land and sea with land creatures (including human beings) who live on that land and feed on that vegetation. We can see the relationship in regards to “habitation” (days one to three) and then “inhabitants” (days four to six).

This is summarized in Genesis 2:1: ***“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished [i.e., the habitation of days one to three] and all the host of them***

[i.e., the inhabitants of days four to six]." We could also think of this in terms of "forming" (days one to three) and then "filling" (days four to six). ***The forming is good. The filling is good. And the whole thing, with man included, is very good.***

Now the point of all of this is that this *good* creation God has made is conducive to life—all biological life (plants, fish, birds, animals) and especially human life. Or to put it this way: This creation we find ourselves on isn't Mars or Mercury or Venus or Pluto (Praise the Lord!). Venus is far too hot, Mars has no oxygen to breath, and Pluto is far too cold! Scientists sometimes refer to this as the "***anthropic principle***": the idea that our planet is uniquely conducive to life.

Let me give you a few scientific examples that make earth the ideally designed place to live:

1. The earth has a slight tilt and teeters like a top as it spins, which could cause drastic shifts in climate over time. But the moon's stabilizing effect on our orbit causes our climate to be a lot more steady.
2. Secondly, Earth's stable rotation with perfect frequency and regularity prevents extreme temperatures and encourages life from so many living things that need the sun every day.
3. Earth has a strong, stable magnetic field which staves off cosmic rays and solar flares that would otherwise fry the planet every now and then.
4. Earth's perfect atmosphere shields us from harmful radiation.
5. The perfect position of Jupiter and Saturn as gas giants in our solar system attract and draw away all looming threats of comets or asteroids hitting the earth.
6. And of course we can't forget the blessing of abundant water, oxygen from plants, rain to cleanse the air, and the perfect temperature to sustain an enjoyable life!

Scientists call this profoundly lucky. I call it profoundly planned! All of this information screams out that God not only providentially planned all

this, but He also cares for His creation! ***You can conclude that because God's creation is conducive to life, God cares for YOUR life!*** He has made you and me an impressive home where we can thrive! Isaiah 49:15 says, *"Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."* 2 Peter 1:3 says, *"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to LIFE and godliness."* ***Therefore, Matthew 6:25 says we should not be anxious about our lives!*** God holds you as more valuable than the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. He cares for them, and so He will most certainly care for you! If God's made us a home such as this conducive for living, He certainly cares for your well-being in it.

Permeated with Purpose

This leads us into our next point. Since God's creation is conducive for life, it's clearly permeated with purpose.

Everything in creation is oriented around a purpose—even if it's not always obvious to us or useful or beneficial. There is a functional integrity to creation. Things, generally speaking, work well and are well-ordered.

Or to put it this way: There's not much pointless stuff or wasted time in creation. Everything is working toward a goal, an end, a purpose. You don't find a pack of wolves loitering in a parking lot somewhere. They're busy. You haven't run across a flock of geese that have nothing to do. You never see an army of ants not hard at work. ***God has designed all things to function instinctively towards a purposeful end.***

The word *tov* in Hebrew, which we translate "good" in Genesis 1, has a wide range of meanings, but it basically refers to being fit for a purpose. Something is good *for some purpose*. ***That is what Genesis 1 is primarily about: God ordering the world and forming it for a purpose, for life, for humanity.***

You will notice the theme of separation in this chapter; the verb appears five times in Genesis 1. It's not about pulling things apart, but rather putting things in their proper place so they are well-ordered. It's like the old adage *"everything has a place, and everything in its place."* **This is the idea. When God sees that His creation is highly ordered for the purpose He intends, He can say that it is good.**

Since we are created in God's likeness, we express the same satisfaction for seeing things put in order for a purpose. After you build something, you naturally want to step back and declare it "good." Now I'm not much of a handyman. Emma will tell you that herself. My dad was very handy, and for some reason none of that seemed to pass down to me. When I see something that needs fixing, I'm prone to pull up Amazon and buy a new one! What I tend to find my appreciation from is building IKEA furniture. (What can I say, I'm kind of an expert at it.) But there really is a sense of satisfaction that comes from starting with hundreds of individual parts and finishing with a purposeful final product. Whatever that final product is for you (I'm sure better than mine), it does make you step back and declare it "good."

God loves purposeful order. He declares it good. And He wants us to love purposeful order in our lives, too. Our lives are not meant to be chaotic messes with incomplete purpose. **God values laser focus and purposeful order in all we do.** When He looks out on your hard day of work with sweat coming down your face, He joins you in declaring it "good." Moms, when you somehow manage to put three meals on the table and keep the house somewhat clean, God joins you in declaring it "good." Student, when you study hard and get that grade you needed, God joins you in declaring it "good." Even when *you* feel like you failed to bring a good result, God still in grace looks to your desire to bring order and purpose out of chaos and still declares it "good." **What encouragement it can be that God looks at our good, purposeful effort and declares it good also.**

He created His good creation to be permeated with purpose, and since we are created in His image, He calls us to also be people who are permeated with purpose.

Enriched by Beauty

Fourth, creation is good because creation is enriched by beauty. You realize the world didn't need to be as beautiful as it is. There is a surplus of beauty in the world around us. The heavens are indeed telling of the glory of God!

We can think of God as a skilled and sophisticated engineer who creates with precise, scientific detail. But God is not just left-brained like a mathematician. He is also right-brained like an artist, poet, or musician. We see this in the text of Genesis 1. Notice how after God creates, He takes a look at what he has created and is delighted with it. ***"And God saw that it was good."***

God, at heart, is an artist who simply enjoys making stuff. He loves materiality. He loves creation. Think about it. He created whole galaxies, billions of stars, that no one will ever see! You could even venture to say He exhibits a kind of "artistic wastefulness" in creating so many things that may never be enjoyed by a single person!

When we have the opportunity to witness the pure beauty of creation, it can have a cleansing effect on our souls. When we get a chance to enter into the enjoyment of God's good creation, we begin to forget about what's bad in our lives. Our stress over having to be something BIG and STRONG at work melts away before the grandeur of God's glorious artistry around us. ***We move away from needing to be great to declaring the One who alone is great. We move away from the stress of holding our lives together to being in awe of the one who holds the universe together.*** This is the spiritually healing effect of appreciating God's good creation.

Can I ask you, are you finding times to escape your work and stress to be in God's sanctuary of creation? Do you have a place you go to see and be reminded of God's beauty, glory, and goodness? One of the reasons God rested on the seventh day was to step back and appreciate the beauty of His creation. He built this into the normal rhythm of a week. Therefore, it should be part of our normal rhythm as well. Seeing and savoring His beauty does wonders for the soul that's caught up in only seeing man-made beauty.

I encourage you to enjoy God's good creation because it truly is enriched in beauty.

Clarified in Christ

Fifth and finally, creation is good in that creation is clarified in Christ.

Jesus Christ is the one who makes sense of creation. Why do I say that? Because, as the Bible says, Jesus Christ is the One in whom, through whom, and for whom all things exist.

John 1:1-3 says *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."*

Colossians 1:15-16 say, *"The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him"*

What does this mean? ***That we cannot rightly understand creation apart from Christ. He is the key to understanding the world correctly.*** His life, death, and resurrection make sense of the creation—not least the goodness of creation.

In His Incarnation, the Son embraces and endorses the fundamental goodness of creation. We cannot believe in the Incarnation—that God became a creature—and say that creation is anything less than good.

In His death, He reminds us there is something deeply broken with creation. The cross of Christ and the death of God incarnate remind us that this creation, yes, is fundamentally good (it's worth dying for!)—but it's also deeply broken, damaged by sin. As Paul says, the creation has itself been subject to futility, and that it now groans in eager expectation for the revealing of the sons of God.

Yet in Christ's resurrection, He reminds us there is a goodness to creation we have not yet experienced!

To say we believe in the goodness of creation is to affirm what we see with our eyes—its purpose and order and beauty. ***But it is also to speak with the voice of faith—to express hope in what we cannot see with our eyes, but what we can only embrace with our faith.***

Hebrews 11:1 says, "***Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***" ***One of the things hoped for, and one of the things not seen, is what the Bible calls the new creation:*** a second creation that will be a lot like this creation, only entirely renewed and perfected, where there will be no more sickness or death, where the lion will lie down with the lamb.

Because Christ came to redeem this creation, we have confidence that He will come again to restore this creation to all its original glory. Don't think that we are destined to leave this world for another place. That would be operating under the assumption that what God created for us is not good enough. ***What we need is not for us to be taken away but for the curse of sin to be taken away!*** The problem is not in the DNA of creation, but the bacteria of sin that infected the DNA. When Christ returns, He will come to make all things new, and He will dwell with us on this restored and renewed earth, just as it was meant to be.

CONCLUSION

So it is good for us to affirm the goodness of creation, even amidst what we see today. We used the example at the beginning of Major League Baseball creating a game that encouraged fans to see and embrace the innate purity, innocence, beauty, and goodness of the game. It was a call back to what baseball fans love and appreciate about the game.

In a similar way, we as believers need to come back to Genesis 1 to recall and celebrate the innate purity, innocence, beauty, and goodness of what God has created. It truly is glorious! It reflects God, is conducive for life, is permeated with purpose, is enriched by beauty, and is clarified by Christ.

If you find yourself today far too “grown up” and therefore caught up in the stresses and burdens of life, I challenge you to come back to God’s goodness as exhibited in His creation of all things. ***Don’t let another day go by where you don’t pause to perceive and praise His handiwork in creation.*** I pray it will liberate your soul from the tyranny of selfish ambition. I pray it will confirm *His goodness to you*. I pray it will instill a greater hope of His coming renewed, good creation.

CLOSING PRAYER