

Sermon File # 490

Scripture Text: Genesis 1:1-2

Sermon Title: *I Believe in God the Creator*

Manuscript written and sermon preached by Roger Roberts

At International Baptist Church, Brussels, Belgium

On Sunday Morning 11 July 2010

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version

For additional information regarding this manuscript, contact Roger.Roberts@ibcbrussels.org.

All Rights Reserved.

I Believe in God the Creator

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to our text for this morning, Genesis 1:1-2. Today we begin a summertime series on the Apostles' Creed, the most ancient and foundational creed of the church, having its formative beginnings around AD 100. In this postmodern age and post Christian culture there has never been a greater need for followers of Christ to recognize the importance of absolute, objective truth and to understand and clearly communicate the beliefs that anchor our lives. The Apostles' Creed, which was taught to converts preparing for baptism, was considered the basic beliefs necessary for every follower of Christ to understand and accept. I hope you'll take this series as an opportunity for you to more clearly understand the essential truths of the faith.

Realizing that summer in Europe is holiday season and that not many of you will be in attendance every Sunday, I encourage you to listen to the voice recordings or read the manuscripts (which are more complete and contain references) on our church's website. My prayer is that we'll all gain a clearer understanding of what the faithful church has believed through the centuries and also what we should understand and hold to as followers of Christ.

The Apostles' Creed begins with this statement:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

There's no better place in Scripture to expound this first line of the creed than the very first verses of the Bible, from Genesis, the Book of Beginnings.

Follow as I **Read Genesis 1:1-2.**

The beginning passage of the Bible is foundational for the Bible's entire message. In fact, it is said that "The foundation of all redemptive history is in this sentence: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth'" (John Piper, www.soundofgrace.com/piper81/100481m.htm). The early church regarded Genesis as important and as the basic text to support the rest of God's story. Even the New Testament writers quoted it most frequently of all Old Testament books, following the Psalms and Deuteronomy. And the church continues to confess in its creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Chapters 1-11 are vitally important in the formulation of a Christian worldview and perspective of God's eternal, triune being as Creator.

In the wake of monumental humanitarian disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes and floods on several continents, one's worldview is put to the test. In an issue of the US weekly news magazine *Newsweek*, reporting on the devastating tsunami several years ago, an old man named Zulkifli was quoted as saying as he surveyed the damage to a Mosque on the island of Sumatra, "This is punishment from the gods." In this post-modern and post-Christian, multi-culture in which we live, as followers of Christ we must have a biblical worldview. What do our Christian relief workers say about God as they move among those whose lives have been devastated by natural disasters?

Even the work of the Great Commission cannot be done apart from the understanding we gain from these opening words of Scripture. Political scientist James Kurth contends that the most significant clash of civilizations in the world today is taking place within Western civilization—"between those who adhere to a Judeo-Christian framework and those who favor postmodernism and multiculturalism" (quoted by Chuck Colson and Nancy Pearcey in *How Now Shall We Live?* page 19). Unless we believe in a personal God who created all that is for his purposes, and if we accept that all religions and worldviews have equal merit, then there is no basis for a doctrine of salvation and certainly no incentive for missions and evangelism. There is not even a lasting purpose for our lives or sense of moral direction for ourselves and society.

Nothing can be more profound and foundational to our understanding than to consider the opening words of the Apostles' Creed that declares our belief in a heavenly Father as the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is within it. The first two verses of Genesis lay a great foundation for the entire Bible. This first verse has been called "the most profound statement in the Bible." It tells us the answer we need for developing a Christian worldview, a perspective on life, "where we come from, why we're here, where we're going." I believe these verses are far deeper and much more significant than

we typically realize. They reveal indispensable truths about God the Almighty Father, who created the heavens and the earth. First, they tell us that God the Creator is...

Separate from his creation

In this postmodern world, there is no absolute truth, it is said. But the New Testament church says God is there, and he has spoken to us in his word. So, we are reading the very word of God who says...

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God is separate from his creation.

This is not a given in much of our culture today. The so-called New Age movement is a tragic departure from the truth of a divine, transcendent Creator-God. The God of Israel and of our Lord Jesus Christ revealed himself through his creation, yet Paul says in Romans One that man exchanged this truth of God as creator and began to worship the creation itself. As was true in Bible times, so today many say creation and god are one and the same. New Age spirituality also says that we are all gods, and ought to be accorded the respect of a god. This is the height of folly and idolatry. According to this view, we as gods are responsible for natural disasters! This shows that if the true God is not worshipped, then something or someone else will be worshipped, including possibly oneself!

James M. Boice says that this verse in our text precludes atheism (which says there is no God), pantheism (which says God is everything and in everything), and materialism (the material is all there is or all that is important). It tells us that God is, and that he is standing over his creation and is apart from his creation.

We know also that the verity of God's existence doesn't need to be argued. His existence is assumed. As James Houston says (*I Believe in Creation*), we can't prove God's existence any more than an actor in a play can get outside a play and try to prove the playwright's existence. There is overwhelming evidence for God's existence, and a lot of plausible arguments have been eloquently and convincingly stated. But, a character in a story cannot step outside the story and understand the motive and plot planned by the author. We are not autonomous. God is.

God is eternal

We know that God created “at first.” There was a time when nothing existed except God himself, not even the heavenly hosts.

The majestic, triune God

The word used for God in this first verse in the Bible is *Elohim*. This is a plural word but is used with singular verbs. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is not

developed in the Old Testament, it is prefigured, as in this first verse in the Bible. Rather than being a specific reference to the Trinity, the Hebrew plural noun with the singular verb is “the plural of majesty” (*NIV Study Bible* notes).

We read in verses like John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2 that God the Son was active in Creation as the Co-Creator with the Father. Without him nothing was made, and the universe was made for him as the arena of his glory.

The Creator God

He is the First Cause of all else that exists. Even the arguments of naturalistic science crumble before this. Even if there were a Big Bang, there was an element that heated up in the first place! Atheistic, “scientific” naturalism struggles to prove that the universe began from the sudden appearance of a particle of “singularity” which exploded in the Big Bang, and formed nebulae some 4.6 billion years ago. From that nebulae the process of biogenesis gave rise to organic life, and the process of macroevolution got us to where we are today.

Random evolution is an indefensible theory in the light of necessary origin and design. The universe shows to the rational mind the work of an intelligent Designer with a transcendent mind. Naturalism is simply an inadequate explanation both for the origin and complexity of creation.

He willed his creation into being at a moment in eternity, before there was time, which is a part of creation. In verses 3 and following we see days of creation. We don’t know the meaning of “yom,” which can refer to 24-hour periods or epochs of time, like we use the word “day” when we talk about “The modern day,” or “in an earlier day.” Bishop Usher conjectured the earth was created in the year 4004 BC. Not that God couldn’t create in six 24-hour days. As someone says, the fossil record could mislead. Consider, wouldn’t the trees in the Garden of Eden have been created with age rings already in place? Couldn’t God have created rocks and even fossils in their “maturity”? He who created time could have transcended the usual processes of aging to create a “mature” creation.

However, astrophysicists and astronomers speak of stars and quasars that are billions of light years away from our telescopes. What our text tells us, I believe, is that God created and ordered his creation through his determined epochs of creation. However, if I had to choose between a godless, naturalistic explanation for the origin of the universe and Bishop Usher’s explanation, I would go with the bishop any day. Naturalistic evolution is a lot more theoretical and has many unproved assumptions. I don’t think we have to choose. The choice is not between the Bible and science. It’s between the Bible and bad science. Truth in science will accord with biblical truth that is not confined to a narrow, rigid interpretation, but that is the truth of what God is saying to us in Scripture. Our creator God is the infinite one, infinite in time and also infinite in and beyond space and certainly beyond our comprehension (*Psalm 147:5, New Living Translation*).

As science progressively reveals, creation is so finely tuned it testifies to intelligent design. “The tyranny of naturalism is losing its grip,” says Kenneth Matthews. The discoveries of DNA and the genetic code in human cells are turning the label, “naturalistic explanation” into an oxymoron (Matthews).

God is independent

“In the beginning *God* created....” This first verse takes us back to the beginning of time itself. It is impossible for us mortals to even imagine eternity, when there was no time, and then, with the New Heaven and Earth, when there will be no more time. But this text tells us that the Creator God is...

Separate from his creation

All of this tells us that because God existed before the Creation, he is independent of it. Before anything of matter, space and the material, God was complete in himself. There is nothing in all of creation that could make God more complete than he has been for all eternity.

In his High Priestly Prayer, and in the part where he prays for us who will believe in Him, Jesus asks the Father that we might see and share the glory and love of the Father that Jesus has enjoyed since before the creation of the world (John 17:24). What an incredible and ineffable thought!

Creating ex nihilo

There are two different words in the Hebrew that appear in the creation account, and the one used here in this first verse in the word, *bara*, which is used to express the bringing into existence something that didn't exist before. In Scripture *bara* is used exclusively of God. The Latin is *creatio ex nihilo*, or “creation out of nothing.” The artist creates with canvas and brush and oil, but God called into existence out of absolute nothingness.

The naturalistic world view of the scientist who denies the work of a creator is at a loss to explain the origin of even the first elements and energy that might have caused the Big Bang billions of years ago. Our text says God created out of nothing, and called those first physical elements into being, simply by the power of his word. He is the “uncaused cause.”

Creating his world

The universe God created is separate from him, but shows his power and wisdom. He created a universe that would declare his glory. This is what David says in the Nineteenth Psalm:

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
The skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

“The heavens” could simply refer to the entire universe, but also would include the spiritual realm of the heavenly places, including heaven, the place where Christ Jesus rules in his glorified body. The heavenly realms include the angelic beings and all who worship around the throne, and even those fallen angels, including Satan and his demons.

The heavens and the earth certainly include the entire universe. God created an orderly world, over which he gave humankind dominion (Genesis 2:28). The general dependability, consistency and orderliness of his creation have made possible the progress of modern science.

Colson says, “Everything that exists came into being at God’s command and is therefore subject to him. Thus, the truth in every area, from ethics to economics to ecology, is ultimately found in relationship to God and his revelation. God created the natural world, natural laws, our bodies and the moral laws that keep us healthy, and our minds and the laws of logic and imagination....

“In every area of life, genuine knowledge means not only discerning the laws and ordinances by which God has structured creation, but also allowing those laws to shape how we should live” (page 18, *How Now Shall We Live?* adult study edition).

God is separate from his creation, but also our text tells us he is...

Sovereign over his creation

Our text tells us that God is sovereign over his creation, which is...

Derived from him

We can be grateful for the gift of life, which is due to the goodness of Sovereign God. All of life is derived from him, and it is...

His will to create

Our physical existence is due to the will of God, whose desire is that we have life, which in itself is incredible. The fact that we owe life itself to God is reason to stop our complaining against him, according to the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, as quoted by Paul (Jeremiah 18:6; Isaiah 29:16; Romans 9:20). Life and every goodness is not our deserving, but is due to the mercy of God, who has the right and the power to both redeem and destroy. James reminds us that God is the source of every good and perfect gift (1:17).

His will to redeem

Even more incredible is the will of God the Creator to redeem us, following our rebellion against him.

Paul says, “In him (Christ) we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...” (Ephesians 1:11). God purposed, even before the creation, to redeem what he knew would fall. And his redeeming purposes include all of his creation (Romans 8:19-22).

When we reflect on horrific natural disasters and world-wide epidemics, we are bewildered. All we can say is that God is perfect love, wisdom and power. He created the world to act in perfect harmony and as a paradise for sinless man. But with Adam and Eve’s fall, sin and suffering entered the world. Without suffering, man would continue unabated and unchecked in his sin. But God uses disasters and suffering as a wake-up call. God doesn’t cause suffering, but he allows it, and just as the cross of Christ provided for our personal redemption, so God is at work redemptively through suffering. Pain, in the words of CS Lewis, becomes God’s megaphone, or his amplifier.

Jesus referred to two national disasters in Luke 13—the murderous acts of Pilate and the collapse of a tower in Siloam. Jesus said those who perished were no worse sinners than anyone else, and unless the more fortunate repented, they too eventually will perish (Luke 13:1-5).

I believe God is at work to draw multitudes to himself in the wake of natural disasters. I have heard amazing testimonies from missionaries and Christian relief workers who give testimonies of people who were rescued from the brink of death to come to faith in Christ. So, even in the wake of the worst disasters, the redeeming God is at work. The question he is raising in the hearts of those who turn to faith is not, “Why did this happen?” Rather, the question grace raises that brings the response of repentance is, “Why *not* me?” Or, “why didn’t I perish? What have I ever done to deserve life and to be redeemed from hell and eternal separation from God?”

Dependent on him

Since the creation of the world all of creation has been dependent on the Maker. Creation is dependent on God for life.

Verse two tells us that the universe God called into existence by his word was at first formless and empty. But the Spirit of God was hovering over this chaos, ready to shape creation according to God’s purpose.

When the Angel Gabriel appeared to the young Virgin Mary, he explained to her how the Messiah would be formed in her womb, while still remaining a virgin:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Peter writes about God's life-giving word. In 2 Peter 3:5, he speaks about God's calling creation into existence by his word. In 1 Peter 1:23, he says we have been born again "through the living and enduring word of God."

God's creation, in during this period of fallenness, as we await the final redemption of creation, is being sustained by his will and word. Paul writes about Christ Jesus that "all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). Hebrews says that the Son sustains "all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:3). Imagine the thoughts racing through the minds of the disciples when the awakened Jesus simply spoke a word and the stormy winds and waves were stilled (Matthew 8:23-27)! Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was asleep during a storm that threatened the lives of his disciples. He created the wind and waves, and demonstrated his power over the elements. Jesus Christ the Co-creator is also the one we trust for all things. Peter urged the persecuted church to "commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (1 Peter 4:19).

Apart from the general grace of God, all of this universe would fall apart and the entire world would dissolve and the universe would self-destruct. Apart from the life-sustaining word of God, you and I would cease to be. In other words, we should be asking, why hasn't God yet allowed the total destruction of this fallen and rebellious world, so ravaged by sin?

These first verses in Genesis frame the story of the Bible with the closing verses in Revelation, the last book, which promises the redeemed, fulfilled creation called the New Heaven and Earth (Revelation 21-22). God, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, will bring all things to their fulfillment (Revelation 22:13). God will finish what he started "in the beginning." That means that the sovereign, saving God will finish his creation in you and in all the people of God (Philippians 1:6), as well as his creation of the heavens and the earth.

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, is the Alpha and the Omega of creation. His purpose for his creation will be fulfilled. When the last of those chosen from before the creation of the world is gathered into his Kingdom, then Jesus will come again to bring the consummation of his kingdom and rule.

Not only is God separate from and sovereign over his creation, finally, he is...

Seen in his creation

Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God;
The skies proclaim the work of his hands."

God revealed in creation

Paul, in Romans 1:20, says that through his creation God has revealed his invisible qualities—"His eternal power and divine nature." His self-revelation

in creation is so conclusive and complete, mankind is “without excuse” for unbelief. We are shown enough in God’s creation to be accountable to God.

John RW Stott says, as St. Paul’s cathedral is a monument to architect Sir Christopher Wren, so creation is a monument to our Creator God. “Wren,” notes Stott, “died before it was completed. His body is buried in the crypt but he has no memorial in the cathedral.”

“Instead, a plaque on his tomb bears a Latin inscription which means, ‘If you seek his monument, look around you.’ In St. Paul’s Sir Christopher Wren needs no monument. His memorial is the cathedral itself, which bears eloquent witness to the architect’s existence and consummate skill. Can we not say the same of Almighty God, the great architect of the whole universe?” asks Stott. “As St. Paul wrote, ‘ever since the creation of the world his [God’s] invisible nature, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made’ (Romans 1:20). This argument from the fact of the universe and from the evidence of the design within it still has power today,” says Stott.

A distinguished London surgeon, a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, wrote a letter to Stott about this subject of God’s self-revelation in Creation. “He said that our knowledge of intracellular physiology had only just begun. He went on with these words: ‘I am filled with the same awe and humility when I contemplate something of what goes on in a single cell as when I contemplate the sky on a clear night. And, in addition, the coordination of the complex activities of the cell in a common purpose hits the scientific part of me as the best evidence for an Ultimate Purpose’” (Page 238, *The 20th Century Pulpit*, James Cox, editor)

God revealed in Christ

God has spoken to us through his creation, enough to get our attention, as it were. He has spoken to us to show us his salvation through Jesus Christ, as we read in Hebrews 1: 2 and John 1: 1-18.

In John 1:18, we read that “No one has seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

Jesus Christ is the word, telling us about God, and also showing us and providing for us the way to God. Before the creation, God willed to provide for the salvation of the believing world through the death of his Son. We see in Jesus, the Co-creator the power of almighty God, as he calmed the seas, healed the sick and raised the dead. Jesus revealed the love of the Father. In his death on the cross we understand the enormity of our sin. In his resurrection we see the power of God to save and forgive, as we follow the risen Christ as Lord. Grace is the initiative and activity of God that enables us to see the saving truth as it is in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit enables God’s light to shine in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6).

God revealed in us

John also says in his first letter (1 John 4:12) something that parallels what he says in his gospel (John 1:18):

“No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1John 4:12).

What an amazing connection and parallel John makes! Jesus Christ made known the Creator. And we, who are being saved by grace and transformed by the Holy Spirit, also are to make him known to our world, our “sphere of influence.”

And we who have been created new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) are re-created for the purposes of God. Paul says in Ephesians 2: 10, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

The word that translates “workmanship” is the Greek “*poema*,” which gave rise to the English word, “poem.” In other words, we are God’s poems, his works of art, to convey his truth and beauty.

God’s purpose in saving us is not just to rescue us from hell. It is to make us into witnesses for Jesus Christ who will glorify God by what we become and what we do to live for him.

We talk a lot about our responsibility to evangelize, but do we realize the incredible privilege it is to show Jesus in our lives, and share with others the truth about the Creator God in the Savior, God the Son?

We can expect many within the unbelieving world to reject our witness, just as we can expect naturalistic, humanistic, and atheistic science to reject the evidence for a Designer, and to hold tenaciously to a theory of naturalistic evolution. When a Designer is posited, then the biblical witness to the Creator seems “dangerously” close. Then, with a Creator comes the biblical witness to a personal God, who is moral and who holds mankind morally accountable. No wonder that in the US the National Public Radio affiliate station in Albuquerque, NM banned the telecasting of a documentary, “Unlocking the Mystery of Life,” that simply explained the research being done on the theory of design as evidenced in creation! This radio station, which is government-supported, and charged with exploring ideas important to all Americans, is prohibiting free speech. They refuse to expose the weaknesses of naturalistic explanations for the origin of life, even though credible scientists are “skeptical about naturalistic explanations for the origin of genetic information” (www.bpnews.net 6 January 2005).

As John says, “Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

But some will see God and will believe in Jesus because they will see him in you and in the gospel you live and share.

Conclusion:

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,” we say together in the Apostles’ Creed. Today we stand before the Creator of the Universe to worship him. As children of God we need to realize God chose us to be his even before he created the universe. He has an eternally conceived purpose and plan for your and my life. The gospel calls us to believe in and submit to the plan and purpose of the Creator and Redeemer God, the God of the cosmos and the God of the cross.

What could be more important than for you and me to submit to his creative purposes?

I read an account on the Internet about a successful attorney in a prestigious law firm in a large city who was also an influential member of a main-line denominational church. This layman came to worship service as he usually did, but on this particular Sunday the pastor’s text was Genesis 1:1. This man had heard hundreds of sermons before, and had observed all the traditions and rituals of his church, and in the eyes of most was a dedicated churchman. But, as this article stated, “God had not been very consequential in his life.” But on this particular Sunday, “As he heard the minister read the words, ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,’ a thought flashed across his mind. If that’s true, I’m in trouble because I’m living my life as if God is not the sovereign Creator and as if I am my own sovereign. And it was in the very hearing of these words that he was brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and now prosperously serves Him in that congregation witnessing to the fact that our God is sovereign Creator of heaven and earth” (www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/genesisvol1and2/01aGenesis.htm).

So, sometimes we need to get back to the basics of who God is, and who we are in his world. This is foundational to the rest of the story about sin, God’s love and grace in Jesus, and the call to faith, repentance and living and serving to his glory.

Let’s remember that God creates out of nothing. That’s what grace means, that God saves us through nothing we bring to him.

Martin Luther said that God created out of nothing, and as long as we are not yet nothing God cannot make something out of us. In other words, you need to come to him in repentance, realizing you cannot save yourself. Then, as you turn from self-righteousness and your sin, and trust in and follow Jesus as Lord, he creates in you a new heart and gives you a new life and a new beginning as well as a new eternal destiny.

Do you know where you came from?

Do you know why you are here? Instead of asking “Why?” in the wake of natural disasters and all human suffering, we should in humility ask, “Why *not* me?” “Why has God created and spared me for this moment in time?”

Do you know where you are going? The Bible begins with God before time, and then concludes with a vision of “the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:13). We were made by him and will stand before him to give an account to him. He is worthy of our worship, love and trust. And our life’s purpose is found in a relationship with him that brings glory and delight to him forever.

Does your life have meaning and purpose?

May God call you to himself through faith in Jesus Christ, as you submit to his divine will and creative, redeeming purpose for your life.

Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Why is the doctrine of the creation important for our worldview as Christians?
2. Why do you think that many who hold to a naturalistic view of the origin of the universe are opposed to the doctrine of creation?
3. As you reflect about the recent tsunami disaster, what do you think Paul might be saying about the effects of sin upon creation and its need for redemption (in Romans 8:19-22)?
4. What does Paul say in Colossians 1:16-17 about the role of God the Son in creation and in sustaining the creation? How are we dependent on Jesus Christ for life itself, as well as for our eternal salvation?
5. What was God’s purpose for the creation? (see Psalm 19:1)
6. What is God’s final purpose for creating you? (see Ephesians 2:8-10)
7. Reflect on whether or not you are living in the light of God’s sovereignty as your creator, to find and fulfill his purpose for you.

All Rights Reserved.

