

Creation and Its Eternal Purpose

by Ward Fenley

Creation. The very word indicates the miraculous. It speaks of the ability to bring into existence. It is a word that tells a story—a story beautiful, transcendent, and profoundly intellectual. Creation marks the beginning of all things, visible and invisible—and time forever after. Nothing can escape the parameters of creation. Nothing can escape its influence. In creation we have the natural and the supernatural; the obvious and the uncertain; the beautiful and the ugly; the healthy and the diseased; the light and the dark; the naked and the clothed, the cold and the warm; the vicious and the tender; the good and the evil; the living and the dead; the earthly and the heavenly. In creation we see the story of all things. It is the story of man and his environment and relationship to that environment and the Creator of that environment. It is with this understanding that we must approach creation in a way which upholds the beauty of that which God intended. If we restrict creation to the mere assembly of atoms into beautiful things to behold with the physical eyes, yet not to be seen as anything other than that: a piece of artwork to place on the wall of the sky, then we have missed the fundamental meaning of creation and perhaps laid the groundwork for some of the gravest misunderstandings of Scripture and the history of redemption and the purpose of this unspeakable gift we call creation.

As an evangelical Christian, when I was first confronted with the idea of an old earth, my first thought was, "This couldn't possibly be true. After all, an interpretation of all passages dealing with the beginning of creation and the end of creation must be exclusively literal. And because the consummation of all things must be literal and conclude with a utopia of physically renewed delights, I cannot possibly affirm such a notion." But as I began to study metaphor and hyperbole in Scripture, including the words of the prophets, whether those words were in conjunction with wars, changes of political systems, or even changes from the old covenantal system to the new covenantal system; I was overcome with a deep sense of awe upon the realization that God has placed such enormous emphasis on the beauty and significance of creation and the necessity of our corresponding appreciation for that very creation.

Creation is Good

Regardless of whether one wants to identify Genesis as a literal account of creation or simply an allegory concerning God's covenantal relationship to His people, it seems rather evident that God has a purpose for creation which goes beyond a mere assent to its existence or even an appreciation for its physical beauty. God says that the creation was good and very good. But beyond Genesis there are innumerable passages which refer to the goodness of creation. Even beyond that there are passages which use metaphors involving the physical creation to refer to the New Covenant kingdom of God. It is in this area of study one finds that God did not merely create this planet and universe to have a few thousand years of significance, but rather that God created this planet and universe as an eternal testimony to the riches of His power, glory, and kingdom

The New Testament kingdom is often described as a place where there is milk and honey (Jer. 32:22), safety (Ezek. 34:27), where the sun always shines (Isa. 60:20), where God's people shine as the stars in the heavens (Dan. 12:3), and the righteous are planted as trees by rivers of water and the sun of righteousness arises with healing in His wings (Psa. 1:3; Mal. 4:2). The question must be raised: If such beautiful aspects of the physical universe are used to describe an eternal kingdom, why would God cause those things to be in existence for only a few thousand years? Wouldn't it seem appropriate to have those things in eternal existence to continually remind the people of God of how significant His kingdom and mercy really are? After all, consider these statements associating some of God's attributes with physical aspects of creation:

Psalm 36:5-7 Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. (6) Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast. (7) How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

Psalm 19:1-6 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. (2) Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. (3) There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. (4) Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, (5) Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. (6) His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Interestingly, Paul interprets this prophetic passage as referring to the Gospel:

Romans 10:15-18 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (16) But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? (17) So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (18) But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

We can conclude that though David seems to use the physical creations of the heavens to be viewed as evidence to show forth the glory of God, Paul takes those words and, by inspiration, makes them refer to the preaching of the Gospel, such that the meaning is as follows:

Heavens=the hearts or consciences of the people of God ("they shall shine forth as the stars of heaven")

Their voice=the Gospel proceeding from the mouth of the preachers

Their line=the message of the Gospel being spread to all nations

In them=In God's people

Has He set a tabernacle for the Sun=God's people are the Temple or Tabernacle where God dwells

Which is as a Bridegroom=Christ as the Husband of His people

In essence, to the people of God, the physical heavens are reminders of their place in the kingdom. When the people of God see the stars they understand those stars to be speaking of themselves—that God designed those stars to speak of the beauty of His people (Psa. 50:2; Dan. 12:3). God designed the Sun to speak of His Son who would be the light of the world, the Bridegroom who would indwell His people, His tabernacle. The heavens were not necessarily designed (as some suppose) to speak of the glory of God to those who do not believe but rather the primary reason for the universe being created was to represent the Gospel and kingdom of Christ to His people. With these things in mind, how should we approach creation as we experience it in greater detail? Several examples of creation can serve as guideposts for those who have believed in Christ.

Since we have discovered that the literal heavens do not literally declare the glory of God, but instead represent God's people, we can safely conclude that passages which speak of normally inanimate objects taking on faculties and abilities reserved for the people of God, very likely are not to be taken literally. They should be taken as directions for the people of God on how to view creation:

Psalm 96:12-13 Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice {13} Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.

Obviously a field is not literally joyful nor do trees express joy. Joy is something humans experience, and in this context the joy represents the hearts of God's people in light of redemption. The field contains the trees. The church contains God's people. As an entire community the church is joyful before God. When we view a field what comes to mind? When we see a beautiful poplar or aspen, are we reminded of the joy God has given us because of His finished work?

Psalm 98:7-8 Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. (8) Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together

In the literal world rushing water and waves make literal clapping sounds. In many prophetic contexts the sea refers to the Gentiles. The point is, water does not have hands. So it would be improper to make this refer to a literal fulfillment. But we offer up praise and thanksgiving from our hearts.

Isaiah 55:12 For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Here trees not only clap their hands but the mountains and hills begin to sing in joyfulness unto God. How do we view mountains? What do they bring to mind? Isaiah brings these metaphors to life:

Isaiah 60:13 The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious.

Isaiah 60:21 Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for

ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.
Isaiah 61:3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Trees tell us of the glory of God in our salvation and eternal life. Trees tell us that we did not plant ourselves but God planted us. Trees, however, cannot come to life without water:

Psalm 1:3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

What do rivers tell us? What do springs and streams tell us about the glory of God and the salvation of His people?

Psalm 46:4 There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High

Isaiah 49:10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

Isaiah 33:21 But there the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams

Rivers should tell us of God. When we come to the bank of a rushing river, surely we should appreciate its beauty, but the primary reason for its creation was for us to glorify God for what He is to us: a place of broad rivers and streams:

John 7:38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

Even common things as food and drink should take on new meaning in light of the purpose of creation. We no longer should view food and drink as that which merely sustains our physical life. Instead, the fact that food and drink sustains our physical life is an illustration of the food and drink of Christ that gives us eternal life:

Isaiah 49:10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

John 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

Through faith in Christ and His finished work on the cross, we live forever and never hunger or thirst. Christ is our righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). We have not sought our own righteousness as the Pharisees did:

Romans 10:3 For being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish

their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Those who have true faith in Christ have sought after God's righteousness and thus are filled:

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

When we partake of a meal and reach the point of fullness, it is God's unique way of giving us an idea of what we have in Christ. We are filled in Him eternally. That is what forgiveness and God's presence is—an eternal filling of righteousness and the holiness of God. God gives us trees, mountains, the sun, wine, food, water to manifest the beauty of His kingdom. Perhaps one of the most meaningful ways God manifests His kingdom is through the institution of marriage. Scriptures abound with references to God as our husband, even relating it to the visible ordinance of marriage. "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her." Christ did not give us marriage as simply an earthly companionship but most importantly to tell us how God has desired our companionship and what His companionship should mean to us. God wanted to dwell in His wife and she in Him:

Psalms 132:13-14 For Jehovah hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for his habitation. (14) This is my resting-place for ever: Here will I dwell; For I have desired it.

John 17:20-23 Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; (21) that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me. (22) And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one; (23) I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me.

Why do we anticipate marriage and love with such intensity? Why is marriage so desired by both bride and groom? Those desires we experience are earthly experiences meant to communicate the experience of God toward us and what should be our experience toward Him. Is it possible that many of our earthly experiences grow dull after repetition because we do not see the heavenly value of earthly experience? Whether it is marriage or a glass of water, or a view from a mountain top overlooking a lush valley, these things speak of heavenly realities. We sometimes forget the need we have for such experiences. If we were deprived of water, beauty, and love, we might begin to long for it once again. When one is without a lover the loneliness is ever-present and we would give just about anything to fulfill our need for a lover. Likewise, when we are desperate for water the craving is undeniable.

Related to marriage (and unfortunately taboo in many Christian circles) is the experience of the orgasm, or climax during sexual intercourse. Historically, intercourse has been viewed in various ways. Some have viewed it as merely a necessity for reproduction. Others have viewed it as a freedom for all to be enjoyed without boundaries. However, sex and the climax were designed to show the heavenly experience. Climax is not an arbitrary experience meant to give us pleasure

for pleasure's sake. It is the most intense experience of humanity. Is this by chance or by the intentional design of a sovereign Creator? Unfortunately sex is abused and thus viewed by some as an evil not to be enjoyed. But God designed sex and the orgasm to depict His love and experience with His Bride. This is not to impose an earthly sensation upon the heavenly God, but rather to show us just how magnificent God's experience with us is on an eternal basis. From Scripture we can clearly see that God has chosen to indwell His Bride. That is, He has consummated the relationship. Our earthly temporal orgasm speaks of what could rightly be called an eternal spiritual orgasm God and His people experience. This should make the earthly experience more meaningful and purposeful, rightly placing sex and orgasm within their proper context: marriage. When we abuse it and throw it around with everyone with no intentional purpose of love and unity, then we miss the heavenly purpose of sex and climax. So often in marriage sex and orgasm become dull experiences. This may be because we again forget to see the heavenly significance of those experiences. We must ask ourselves: Why do I love sex and long for orgasm? Even the question seems borderline inappropriate. But we have made it so. We have abused it, trivialized it, and demonized it rather than viewed the experience through heavenly eyes. We long for it because God has placed in our hearts and experience the things which speak of His glory, holiness, and the beauty of relationship with him. The sexual experience speaks of the height of God's delight within the church of Jesus Christ. This subject should not be taboo but instead become a catalyst for discussion for those seeking to find purpose and renewed excitement in life...and marriage.

Finally, the beautiful and miraculous result of the orgasm (and thus insemination) is life. Life is the fruit of the most delightful and pleasurable experience between man and woman. In light of the heavenly perspective it is almost impossible to miss the purpose of the birth of a child. The human life is eminently above every other creation—greater than mountains, trees, earth, and the universe--it speaks to us of life and conscience, reason and intellect, good and evil, joy and sorrow. And it is the result of the union of bride and groom. How could it not speak of the resulting eternal life from the insemination of the church by God Himself? Eternal life is the result of the efficacious love and pleasure of almighty God. The birth of a newborn should spark a heavenly vision of our life in Christ. Is the primary reason for a newborn the immediate earthly joy of the man and woman? Or is the birth and resulting joy a clear direction to the conscience of the pure and heavenly-minded?

Joy diminishes when we lose the heavenly perspective. All earthly experiences, even marriage, sex, and birth, somehow lose their fascination and allure when we lose sight of their heavenly meaning. Creation was specifically for God's people to be directed toward Him. It follows that creation contains the ever-existing guideposts of stars, water, sun, marriage, climax, birth, and joy in order to direct our hearts to meditate on the nature of God and His kingdom.

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold all things have become new." The conscience in Christ is new, pure, and undefiled. And in a very real sense because of Christ's cross, resurrection, and presence the entire physical universe has become new through the new eyes God has given us. Because of the blood of the Son, the Father is able to view us with new eyes even though we often don't feel new. Likewise, because of the blood of the Son, His

people are able to view the physical universe with a new and vibrant freshness that speaks of the highest heavens, even the presence of God Himself. If indeed the creation is new, then it is eternally wonderful and should be cherished and welcomed, not abused, trampled upon, and destroyed out of selfish ambition. The humanistic world would have us save the planet for our own selfishness. The God-centered world would have us save the planet for God's glory and our view of that glory through the cosmos. Perhaps Christianity and environmentalism do not have to be diametrically opposed. It is a pseudo-Christianity which seeks to do anything and everything to destroy the planet in order to serve a temporal purpose. It is a real and credible Christianity which upholds the significance of the universe and its potential for all those who trust in Christ. "The earth abides forever" wrote the wisest man in the world (Ecc. 1:4). And the Psalmist wrote:

Psalm 72:5 They shall fear thee while the sun endureth, And so long as the moon, throughout all generations.

In Christ we are a new creation and in Christ the physical creation has become new to us. We must have a mindset that sees each other and creation through God's eyes in order to perpetuate the universe in a God-honoring way which contributes to the vitality and spiritual well-being of humanity.