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God Is: The Creator and Owner

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TEXT: Genesis 1:1-2:4 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations
of the heavens and the earth when they were created,
in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

Dear friends,

In our Apostles’ Creed, we say, “I believe in God.” OK... what do you know and believe about God? There are some crazy notions about God floating around out there, you know? In his book *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith summarized perceptions about God that are prevalent in the church and in contemporary culture today. He said that most young evangelicals believed in what could best be described as “moral,

therapeutic deism.” Moral implies that God wants us to be nice. He rewards the good and withholds from the naughty. Therapeutic means that God just wants us to be happy. And deism means that God is distant and not involved in our daily lives. He may get involved occasionally, but on the whole, He functions like an idea, not a personal being actively present in our world. Actually, it sounds more like Santa Claus, doesn't it? Someone once said, “God made man in his own image and man returned the favor,” and that is a dangerous way to live. We need to get what we know and believe about God right. Pastor and author Eugene Peterson wrote, “Nothing counts more in the way we live than what we believe about God. A failure to get it right in our minds becomes a failure to get it right in our lives. A wrong idea of God translates into sloppiness and cowardice, fearful minds and sickly emotions.” Peterson's right, we don't want that for ourselves, so this series is about getting to know the things that God wants us to know about Himself. We're using Old Testament narratives to gain some valuable insights on God. And then we'll finish up with His greatest revelation in the New Testament.

In today's passage, God tells us He's the creator of Heaven and Earth, as the Apostles' Creed says. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” we're told in verse one. Let's look first at the very first four words there: “In the beginning, God.” That's important. God is the beginning and God's the end. History is “His story.” This is the beginning of His story, in Genesis. He made everything. He always was, is, and ever shall be. We did not create God. God created us. In our text for today, you probably notice reads more like a liturgical passage with repetitions in it, making it easier to use in worship and easier to memorize. There's a pattern: “God said...,” “...and it was so,” “...and it was good,” night and day. You see, the Bible is not meant to be read like a science textbook. We have to read it and think like Hebrews when we read this account. It's basically making a strong statement, not so much on the “how” of creation, but on the “who.” The main point of Genesis 1 is: God made everything and it was good.

And it reminds us that since the creator always has rights of ownership, God owns all that He's made in everything, including you and me. You're not on your own, you're not a free agent, your life is a trust given to you by God. And we learn that you're the masterpiece of His creation as a human being. God saved the best for last. On the sixth day, He made man and woman in His own image. He blessed them, gave them dominion over the world to provide for themselves. Now, being created in God's image is a very special position, it sets us apart from the rest of the creation; it means we have

a mind with which we can think, a will to make decisions, and we are eternal. We've been created to have a relationship with God. And we also have been given dominion over the Earth to manage it. Human beings, as image bearers, are made to work and to rule and to serve as God's stewards and to be surpassingly God-centered, to have a relationship with God. So, the main theological truth that's being passed along to us today is: God created everything, and He owns it, and it was very good.

This creation account has some personal implications for you and me, you know. Four things that I would like to pass on to you today: first, God's big, so therefore live like it. Trust Him, obey Him, worship Him in all things. Christian author Dallas Willard wrote,

I strongly believe that the way we live is a consequence of the size of our God. The problem many of us have is that our God is too small. We're not convinced that we're absolutely safe in the hands of a fully competent, all-knowing, ever-present God. When we wake up in the morning, what happens if we live with a small God? We live in a constant state of fear and anxiety because everything depends on us. Our mood will always be governed by our circumstances. We'll live in a universe that leaves us deeply vulnerable and afraid. We cannot be generous because our financial security depends on us. If somebody gets mad at us or disapproves of us, we will get all twisted up in knots because we won't have the security of knowing that a giant God is watching out for us. We need to live like He's got the whole world in His hands.

It also means that it's important to continually be turning to Him as the inventor of us in His word and in prayer, knowing that as our creator and designer, He really does know what makes life work best.

Now, the second thing we learn is that we were made by God, for God. We're to walk with Him, have a dependent relationship with Him. Because the truth is, we need God. In Him, we live and move and have our being, He gives to humankind life and breath and everything, as the apostle Paul says in Acts 17. So we live humbly, walking with God, acknowledging that truth, leaning heavily upon Him. We live knowing that each of us is precious and important in His sight. He doesn't make junk – that we're valuable to Him. Jesus even said that when He pointed out all the creation around Him and how God cared for it, He said, "You're more value than many sparrows. He even knows the number of hairs in your head." So, you're valued and he knows you. In fact, you're so valuable that when we rebelled against God in our sinfulness, He became one of us and sacrificed Himself on a cruel cross to pay for your sins and mine, to restore that broken

relationship. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself to make us His own again. So, Genesis 1-2 leaves no room for poor self-image; you're precious and important in His sight. And you need to claim this truth. And this truth also has implications for how we are to see and treat other people: as equals, with dignity and respect, no matter what the color of one's skin or social standing or economic status or creed or conduct. It breaks God's heart to see hate crimes against Asians in our country, for instance, and white supremacy. This is not what God intended. It's outside what He wants, it's sinful.

Now, the third thing we see is that we need to see ourselves as managers, not owners, of His creation. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, wrote, "The possessor of Heaven and Earth placed you not to be a proprietor, but as a steward." Steward means manager. So, we need to ask if we're stewards, how are we doing at that? Scientists are telling us we're not doing very well at all. We're being warned of climate change and pollution of our air and our water. Believers in Christ should be leading the way in changing our habits and setting an example for the rest of the world in taking care of God's creation. I so appreciate what Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "The Earth, which nourishes me, has a rightful claim on my work and energy. In return, I have no right to despise the earth on which I live and move. I am bound to it by loyalty and gratitude. It would be evading God's call if I were to dream away my earthly life in longing for thoughts of Heaven." We're called to be stewards. And by the way, how are we doing with the management of our own possessions and our money? How are you managing those riches that God has entrusted you with? We need to ask that if we truly believe God is the creator of Heaven and Earth, are you holding on to them tightly, selfishly, and using them only for self? Or are you holding onto them loosely, gratefully, seeing everything as a gift from God, giving a portion back to Him with Thanksgiving in your heart? With the words of this hymn, "We give the but thine own whatever the gift may be, all that we have is thine alone, a trust o Lord from thee."

Finally, the fourth thing: knowing God's intentions, His perfect world, we see how far we've fallen. We keep that in mind, and so we pray and we long for His kingdom to come. A perfect world under Him is on its way, so we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven." As Christians, you see, we look back on Genesis 1 and we see God's original intentions, and we remember that because of what Jesus has done for us, a new Heaven and a new Earth is coming on the final day. And it

will be perfect – there will be no hint of death and decay, no killing or malice or hate or one-upmanship or arrogance or pride or destruction. Everything will once again be “very good,” restored to what God intended it. And belonging to Jesus by grace, through faith, we will enjoy eternity with Him who made us and redeemed us for Himself.

Now, I want to conclude this message today with this final thought: as a Lutheran, a proud Lutheran at that, I can't help but think of the meaning of the first article on Martin Luther's small catechism that I memorized as a teenager in confirmation.

I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He's given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers. He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil. All this He has done out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy, though we do not deserve it.

And here's the part that we need to remember today as we finish this up: “Therefore, we ought to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true.” Amen to that. Let's pray:

Gracious God, how great thou art. Thank you for life and breath and everything. Help us to always keep in mind that this is your world. It's in your hands. And that you love it. Help us to remember that you know, as our maker, what makes life work best. Help us to trust in you, to surrender ourselves to your care, and place our faith in your Son, Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.