

Last autumn Gordon Randall and I led a Christianity Explored course. At the start of it we asked the members of the course a question, "if you could ask God one question what would you ask?"

I wonder what you might ask? Have a think perhaps even write it down.

The writers of the Psalms had lots of questions for God but one stand out in Psalm 8:4, "what is man that you are mindful of him"? What are we humans and why does God seem to bother with and so much so that, as we have just been seeing over Christmas, he became one of us? What is man?

During these next 12 months, as we have been thinking earlier in the service, we will be trying to encourage each other to grow in our relationship with God, that is in the 'up' direction. That phrase as you may know comes from our Lifeshapes studies and the triangle which teaches us that as Christians and as a church we need balance in our lives between the 'in', that is sharing with other Christians, the 'out' that is relating to those who are yet to come to faith and the 'up' that is our relationship with God.

To start us off with this in our sermon series we have decided to spend some time in Genesis 1-12.

Today we look at Gen 1 & 2 and at creation to see the nature of our God and, in answer to the question 'what is man', to see how we relate to our God.

The first three words of the Bible, "In the beginning". It is the best place to start because it is only by understanding the beginning that we can comprehend the rest. However, we know we cannot fully fathom this opening verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". But if we are to at least try to understand them we must recognise that these words were written for people who know God to show them the God they know.

This passage, and indeed the whole book, is going to be about God. I hope you're aware of that whenever you open the Bible: it is a book about God. We usually read it to find out about ourselves, about me and about the human race, but it is primarily a book about God. So today we are going to look at two things about God before we look at one thing about ourselves.

1. God is creator of everything

v1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". That is God created all that there is.

What we are faced with here is a statement about God. He is there in the beginning. He is outside of time and separate from the world which he is about to make. As we read through these verses in Gen 1 we see how he made this world, the heavens and earth and everything that is on and in this world we live in.

I have spent a good bit of Christmas watching one of my grandchildren create models out of K'nex. However, God's act of creation was very different from that. He didn't just create one or two things he created everything. For God there was no blueprint or plan for him to follow. God created not

with existing materials but simply out of nothing. God created not by manufacture and manipulation but, as we see over and over again in these verses, by his word – God spoke and it happened.

That is pretty amazing isn't. He spoke and it happened. I am a parent and I have been a teacher and I know that when I speak often very little happens!

God spoke and it happened, be it light or land or plants and trees they were created by the word of God.

God is the creator of all. We see this is in the Psalms where that Psalmist says to the people, "Know that the Lord is God" (Ps 100:3). How did they know that? "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us."

Because God created everything he is God. Now I am very aware of the debate between science and the Bible, the search for the so called 'God particle' and the theory of evolution. However, I am convinced that we need to recognise that Bible and Science approach creation from different perspectives often asking different questions of why and how.

Gilbert Ryle the 20th Century philosopher pointed out that, even if the day should come when physics has answered all the questions of physics concerning the creation of the world, not all the questions are question of physics. He illustrated his point with reference to a game of billiards which can be explained in terms of mechanical laws of force and motion. However, he pointed out, to explain it this way doesn't satisfy us or give the full picture for we must also explain it in terms of the rules of billiards and the strategies or purposes of the players.

As we trace the story of creation through the Bible we see the purposes of God behind creation rather than the mechanical means by which the world was created.

The Bible leaves us in no doubt that God created the world and all that is in it.

As creator we can then say a second thing about God

2. God is Lord over all creation

A number of times down the years I have been asked what my world view is. A world view very simply is our understanding of how the world in which we live works. As a Christian my world view is that God made the world but humanity has spoiled that world and its relationship with the creator. However God has not given up on his world. He sent Jesus into the world that through his death on the cross humanity might be restored to God the father. One day Christ will return as God and King to bring to an end the history of the world and there will then be a new heaven and earth.

A big part of the Christian world view is as we have seen that God is ruler of the world and involved in that world which leads to this heading he is Lord over all creation.

I think we see this supremely in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

We see Jesus show his authority over nature as in the boat on the stormy Sea of Galilee, "He got up rebuked the wind and said to the waves "Quiet, be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm" (Mark 4:39) He is Lord over creation and through his death and resurrection showed that there is no power in creation greater than his.

The God who created the world and everything in it is Lord over that world and over every person and nation.

Often we look at our world and as we see tensions between nations such as the battle in the Ukraine or the spread of the Isis forces in Iraq we may well wonder is our world out of control, eventually to destroy itself?

Well as with so many things we have no idea how eventually this world will come to an end but if we believe God is creator then we know it will not end except according to his will. He is Lord over creation and Lord of the nations.

In Jeremiah 18 God used the analogy of the potter to describe his rule over Israel and through that over every nation, "'O house of Israel can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand,'" (Jer 18:6). Then in Isaiah 40:21-23, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing."

It is God who is Lord over all the nations and over their rulers whether they acknowledge him or not and ultimately his will must be done. Yes we will see wars and rumours of wars. We will see fighting and bloodshed because humanity has turned its back on the creator God but along the way we also see amazing things which can only happen by the power and grace of God, the end of apartheid in South Africa, the disintegration of the communist block and so forth. However it will only be at the end of time that rulers will face not the War crimes tribunal in the Hague but come before the throne of God. In many senses humanity has acted to return the world to chaos but there is a God who is in control and who rules the nations.

However such things are distant from us and we need to personalise this and ask how does this relate to you and I?

Well, as we saw earlier, the Psalmist spells it out for us, "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

As creator God is God and we are his and as such our lives should be submitted to his rule.

It is not sufficient for us to say God is creator unless we then say therefore he is my God who has the right through his word and his will to rule and direct my life. The Psalmist described us as the sheep

of his pasture but perhaps a better analogy would be children of God. As his children are we living under his rule and in a way that brings him glory?

I remember as a child a number of times being on the edge of doing something and then thinking I don't think my Dad will be pleased if I do that. As children of our heavenly Father, sons and daughters of the creator God our desire should be that our lives should bring him pleasure and honour.

So as you run the rule of God's word over your life how does it look? Are you seeking to live day by day under his rule and according to his will? Did your life last year bring honour and pleasure to God and if not what are we going to do about it this year? He is the creator of everything and as part of his creation we submit to his rule and will.

However that does bring us back to the question of the Psalmist with which we began, "what is man that God is mindful of him?"

Why is God so bothered with us humans?

3. Humanity is the pinnacle of God's creation

Genesis 1 sees the creation of light and earth and sun and moon and plants and animals and then we get to Gen 1:26&27, "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

If we are to properly relate to our God we need to know who we are in relation to him and these verses help us but I must be quick in unpacking them.

a. we are made in God's image and likeness

now that doesn't mean that we are little gods. We are not God because we have been made by him.

Nor does it mean that we look like God in the way we may think a child looks like his parents.

So what does it mean?

Henri Blocher in his book 'In the Beginning' puts it like this, "God created man as a sort of earthly son who represents him and responds to him."

We humans are special because we alone in creation are made in God's image to represent God in creation, having his care and concern for the world as we will see in a moment but more in that we alone in creation can respond to God. We are made to relate to him. This is an essential aspect of our humanity and is central to what we as a church are thinking about this year. God has made us so that we can and should relate to him.

St Augustine in his 'Confessions' stated, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." We are created to relate to the creator. So how are you getting on in

your relationship with God? Is there space and time in your life for the Father who gave you life? Is there a growing understanding of God? Is there a deepening walk with him? If not are you going to do anything about it?

God made us in his image to respond to him and

b. we are made to rule under God

As God rules over all He has created, so humans are to rule over that creation. What an awesome responsibility! The astonishing human domination of this planet is not mere chance. God set us here to be as He is, to rule and to subdue. Here it is clear from the book of Genesis that the dominance, the supremacy over our environment that the human race has achieved was set by God from the outset. He set us here to rule and to subdue.

So what are we to do about it? We are to be like God who delights in His creation (v 31), who sustains it (vv 29-30) and who cares for it. Here is the job description for humanity, as it were: to be God's image, to rule and to subdue.

“What is man that you are mindful of him”?

We **recognise** that we are part of God’s creation and we acknowledge God as the Lord of creation by willingly **submitting** our lives to his rule and reign.

We **rejoice** in our nature that we are made in God’s image through which we can **live** in a relationship with him.

We **respond** to the task he has given to us to rule over creation by **caring** for the world he has given us.