

## SHOULD WE PANIC

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Scripture: Genesis 1,2

In the good old days, only Asterix used to fear about the sky falling on his head. Recently Greta Thunberg, said at Davos, “I don’t want you to be hopeful; I want you to panic.” And of course, in the last week, and even this morning, there’s news everywhere and there’s panic and there’s different projections. And the sky does seem to be falling on our head.

Yet, perhaps it is age, but I resonate with Louis Armstrong who said:

I see skies of blue, and clouds of white,  
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night.  
And I say to myself, “What a wonderful world!”

If you want to hear that, fly Vistara – they play it for you every time you land and take off.

But seriously, how should we, as Christians, respond to the crisis that is all around us? Is the sky likely to fall on our head? Are we at the end of the world? Is climate change real? Should we panic? Yet, as we look at it, we see that there are different responses. Even as we look at climate change, all the academicians and scientists agree that climate change is real, and yet they can’t really agree on the reason why. There’s no agreement as to what really causes it – whether human activity is the cause or not. And similarly, with all these other challenges as we look at the virus going around and so on.

So, how do you and I look at the future? Most of the projections that we see, whether it is climate change or this, are computer-generated; and 95% of the time they are wrong. They overestimate as to what is going to happen. But as a Christian, we are faced with the question: how do we respond? I am not a scientist, but does my worldview as a Christian speak to the challenges that I have, to the challenges that my friends around me have? What effect does it take on my heart and mind as I face the issues that are at heart? As a Christian, how do I respond to those challenges as well, as I look to people around who perhaps don’t have the same resources that you and I have? How are we to minister to them at that point of time. And yet, it also reflects these questions that we hear, reflect on the very time in which we live.

The philosopher John Gray calls this ‘the secular reincarnation of Christian beliefs.’ Most of what we hear seems to be apocalyptic, and I’ve actually heard that word in the past week. It’s the apocalypse, it’s the end, the end of the world. A lot of it draws from the biblical basis and it ‘replaces fundamental second coming religion’. They take that and they use it for the fears that they have. John Stonestreet says, “The modern discourse is often a parody of Christian ideas and concepts.”

So, in a world where naturalism is the predominant worldview and there is no sustaining creator, then they have every right to be fearful. Greta Thunberg is right; she has no future and there’s nothing that anyone of us can do about it. The ‘extinction rebellion’ has the same worldview. There’s a futility that comes from living in a meaningless universe. On the other hand, you have the tree-huggers and PETA, for example, who are driven by a pantheistic view where mother nature is in reality being worshipped.

But where do you and I stand as Christians? Do we have an answer to the world around us? Perhaps the best place to begin is, as Julie Andrews said, “Let’s start at the very beginning.”

Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

In the beginning God. Before anything there was God. One of the fundamental pillars of our belief is that, whatever the process or timeline of creation, it was initiated by God who existed in eternity before there was a beginning. The question is not so much how, as who. The naturalist doesn’t accept this. For them, creation, the world that we have today, is a series of random events that has resulted in the world that we live in today. Hence apart from having no ultimate purpose, it would then logically continue to be subject to random events just like the ones that we are living in today, and have no real future either.

But the Biblical account of creation stresses that there was a creator, that His creation, that we are a part of today, came out of His creative mind. And right from the start, it affirms the goodness of creation.

Vs. 3 – *And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.*

Vs. 4 – *God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness.*

The clearest thing that we see from Genesis 1 is the affirmation of the goodness of creation. ‘God saw that it was good’ is repeated six times in this chapter – day 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and again after the creation of humanity.

And yet, as we look at the world today, this can be one of the most difficult things for us to affirm, the goodness of creation, not just because of the natural disasters or even the plagues and other things that go around us. But it’s hard to look at it as we look at nature, there is so much that is ambiguous at best, so much that looks harsh, so much that doesn’t make sense to us. So, like the poet, Alfred Tennyson, we might be tempted to say, as he wrote, that nature is “red in tooth and claw”. We do see there’s a sort of survival of the fittest, and the strongest eat the next, and so on. Some have referred to this not as a problem of evil, but as a problem of goodness.

The question for us living today is not how we explain the presence of evil in this world, but where do we find goodness in this world? What does it mean for you and me to make that claim that creation is good? As Christians we believe that the world that we live in today is not the same as what God created in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. The fall that came as the outcome of Adam’s sin brought in death and an alienation between creation and the creator at all levels and in all spheres.

This was Darwin’s struggle too. He struggled with the cruel nature. And as he looked at it and as he reflected at the nature of nature, it ended up eroding his faith, his confidence in the goodness of God. And so, he moved away and he said to a friend, “What a book a devil’s chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horribly cruel works of nature!” And we all know where he ended up with that. Nature red in tooth and claw.

But as we look at Genesis 1, and we look at God’s word and all that He’s done for us, I believe that it brings us back to the point, and reaffirms to us what God had in store and where we are today, and where we are going. I believe that’s God’s Word for us as we go out, as we face the challenges, it’s good for us to remember what God did, where we are today, and where we are going.

So, let’s look at creation itself, what God did. Creation itself – 5 things.

## 1. Creation is reflective of God:

Creation reflects; it reveals God to us – His nature, His character and His goodness. You remember everything that happens after Genesis 1:2 depends upon the God who creates from verse 1. We so often tend to focus on the days, but the focus is on the God who speaks, who reveals, who creates. Creation ultimately reveals God.

We want to say creation is good because God is good. And even though creation isn't God, it is still good, just like God is good – because God, in His goodness, made this creation. God has gifted this creation so that it reflects His nature, it reveals His character, His wisdom, His intelligence. That's why Paul writes to the Romans when he says, "God's invisible qualities are clearly visible – His eternal power and divine nature." But creation importantly also reflects the goodness of God – His kindness, His generosity, His graciousness, His love, the common grace that He extends to everyone in this world.

Creation is a gift, not a given. We see God's power and genius as the architect and maker of creation. But we also see God's continuing care and protection. Jesus says, "He dresses the lilies of the field, He feeds the birds of the air, He causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. Even as we look at the world and we see all the cataclysmic events going around us, through this we still see His sustaining power and his care. The winds and waves still obey Him. Job talks about Him setting the boundaries of the sea. So, you and I can trust His care. The world is not hurtling to an uncontrolled oblivion; God is the ruler yet.

## 2. Creation is conducive to life:

Creation is good because it is conducive to life. Perhaps the most obvious thing as we look at Genesis ch. 1, is its structure, in terms of the six days. But if you look at the sequence, it's not just a linear sequence day 1, day 2, day 3 and so on. No! They are carefully arranged in two groups – day 1, day 2, day 3 and day 4, day 5, day 6. On the first three days of creation, God creates the habitats or the environments and in the next three days of creation, He fills those habitats and environments.

Day 1: day and night;

Day 4: He fills the heavenly place with lights.

Day 2: He creates the sky

Day 5: He fills it with birds.

Day 3: He creates the land and the sea (including the vegetation)

Day 6: He fills the land and the sea with the creatures including human beings to feed on the vegetation.

So, it's habitation on days one to three, and then inhabitants on days four to six. And this is summarized as we get to Genesis 2:1 where it says, "*Thus the heavens and the earth were completed* (i.e. the habitations on days one to three) *in all their vast array* (i.e. the inhabitants on days four to six)." We could also think of this as forming and filling. Forming (days one to three) and filling (days four to six). The forming is good and the filling is good. And the whole thing, with man included, is very good.

The point of this is that God has made this world conducive to life – all biological life (plants, fish, animals) and especially human life. This world that we live in is not one of those other planets that we couldn't sustain on. As scientists say, this is the Anthropic principle: our planet is uniquely designed and perfected for life. indeed our solar system, our galaxy is uniquely perfected for life. scientists will tell us that even a slightest fraction of a difference, and life wouldn't be possible.

So when the extinct rebellion protesters talk about life going out because of climate change, they are ironically actually reinforcing the biblical teaching that this is a world uniquely created for man, that the slightest variants would be life would not exist, that this too fine-tuned to be a random accident.

### **3. Creation is Suffused with Purpose:**

Everything in creation has a purpose; it's oriented around a purpose, even when it's not immediately obvious to us. There is a functional integrity in creation – things generally work well and they are well-ordered. Or, to put it this way, there is not much pointless stuff in creation. Everything seems to be working towards a goal. (Well, except our pet dogs, I guess. They are there just to be cute and make us happy. So they have a purpose. I sure wouldn't mind a dog's life)

The word 'good' in Hebrew which is there in Genesis, is the word 'tov' and it has a wide range of meanings. It basically means that it has a purpose, it's fit for a purpose. And everything is good because it has a purpose. That's what Genesis 1 is primarily about – God is ordering the world, forming it for a purpose, for life and for humanity.

You will notice the theme of separation in this chapter; the verb appears five times in Genesis 1. It's not about God pulling things apart, but rather that He is putting things together in their proper place so that they are in the right place. When we tidy up our homes, we put things in their right place. We might pick some things up from somewhere else, but it is creating order in that. And that's what God is doing as he does creation. He sees that His creation is highly ordered for the purpose that He intended it for. And then He says that it is very good.

Perhaps the best way that we can look at this word 'good' in Genesis 1 is to see what is described as not good; and we have one example in Genesis 2:18, *The Lord said, "It is not good for man to be alone."* What does that mean? Does it mean that there is something wrong with creation? Was there an imperfection about Adam when Eve wasn't there? Or is there something immoral? No! What God is saying is that something is not rightly ordered in that something was not put together exactly the way it should be. That is why, at the end of the opening chapter in verse 31, God said all that He had made, everything had a place, everything was rightly ordered and everything had a function. And God was it was good. Creation is good because it is suffused with purpose.

### **4. Creation is Enriched by Beauty:**

We know that the world didn't need to be as beautiful as it is. Whenever we get a chance to travel, one's breath is still taken away by sunsets, by mountains, by sea. There is a surplus of beauty around us. The heavens indeed tell us of the glory of God. Have you ever noticed how many shades of green there are? As you drive around, each leaf almost has a different color.

Some older visions of God coming out of the scientific revolution – Isaac Newton, when he looked at how sophisticated a world God had created, he thought of God as a very skilled watchmaker. That does emphasize rightly that God is a God of order. He has put systems, there is structure and there is law.

But while the world is well-ordered, it is also enriched by beauty. God is not just left-brained like an engineer or a mathematician. God is also right-brained like an artist, or a poet, or a musician. We see this in the text of Genesis. Notice how often God, as he creates, He takes a look and He is delighted with it. And He says that it is good. God, at heart, is an artist who simply enjoys making stuff. He loves materiality. He loves creation. Think about it: He has created whole galaxies, billions of stars that no one will probably ever see. Not only that, He created creatures that we are still discovering. There's a sense of artistic wastefulness to creation. The artists create painting for their own enjoyment. The musicians create music for their own enjoyment. And God loves to create as He looks at the beauty. Even if the paintings are never seen or the beauty is never understood. So creation is enriched with beauty.

#### **5. Creation is Clarified in Christ:**

Creation is good because it is clarified in Christ. Jesus is the one who makes sense of creation. Why do I say that? Because, as the Bible says, *It is in Him through whom, and for whom, all things exist.*

John 1:1-3 *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 *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 it mean? It means that without Christ, we simply can't understand creation. He is the key to our understanding the world rightly. His life, death, and resurrection help us make sense of creation. It is in His incarnation that He embraces creation. He endorses the fundamental goodness of creation because He became a man. And since He became a man, creation can't be anything less than good. And yet, in His death, He also reminds us that the world in which we live is deeply broken, which brings us to where we are today.

As we reach the end of creation, we come to verse 26: *God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

Up to now, God said and it happened. But with man, God said: "Let us make man." Someone said that we have God's fingerprints on us. And man is made with a purpose, not to have a

dog's life, but to be fruitful, to fill the earth and to subdue it. There are three vital ingredients in this mandate: Righteousness, Relationship and Responsibility

- Of all creation, only man is said to be made in God's image. What does that mean? I am not like God. I'm not immutable, I am not eternal. But humans were made to be visible reflection of what God is like. Yet today, because of sin, that reflection is deeply marred. But through the work of the incarnation and the resurrection, Paul says we are now being transformed once again into His likeness with ever increasing glory. But we live as fallen human beings among fallen human beings. So we need to realize that the basis of all the challenges that we have, even within nature, it's the issues of the heart that have to be addressed. No amount of legislation can fix that.
- We have a relationship problem among us. As we look at this passage that we just read, let me explain the Hebrew linguistics that will help us. The Hebrew word for the human species is the word 'adam'. We use it as the name of a person. But it is used 3 ways in the early parts of Genesis.

i) It is used as a common noun. In verse 26 it says, "*Let us make man in our own image,*" literally saying, "Let us make adam in our image. Verse 27, "*So God created man,*" literally "God created adam". Some of the Bible translations will have that in the margins. In a sense here, Adam is being used as a common noun for all humanity. Hebrew has only two genders – masculine and feminine; it doesn't have a neuter gender, which means that everything is one or the other. Therefore, the name of Adam at this stage is not about being male, it's about being human.

Genesis 5:2 – *He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, He called them* (the NIV says "man" but the Hebrew word is "adam") *Adam*. All translations have struggled over this. Only the King James says, "He called them Adam." So, Adam is a common noun which is describing all humanity.

ii) It is used as a title. In 2:20 "*So the man gave names to all the livestock*" literally, Adam gave names to all the livestock. It's a title in this case. "*But for Adam so suitable help was found.*" Literally for the man, no suitable help was found. So really, it is a title, not a personal name.

iii) It is also used as his personal name. chapter 4 it says, "*Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.*" This is now Adam being used as his personal name.

Why is this important? Because in our English reading of the word, so often man is substituted for the word Adam. So it can create a sense of male dominance over the female in the early chapters of Genesis – that there is a man, male, and then along comes a little helper, female. When we read it that way, that's wrong. In Genesis 1 and 2, male and female are equal in creation, equal in commission, equal in righteousness. When God saw that Adam needed a helper, it wasn't because Adam was lonely. Adam needed a helper to fulfill the commission that God had given him – to take care and to rule over the world in the responsibility of the sovereignty that was to be theirs.

In chapter 2, we find a more detailed version of the events of the sixth day – Adam was made from the dust of the ground, and later, Eve is created from his rib. (Guys, remember we were taken from the dust) Then God says it is not good for man to be alone. so God made a helper for him. When it says that God made a helper for him, it speaks of the interdependence of each one, not a priority of the male over the female.

The word ‘helper’ is very important. It occurs nine times in the Old Testament. Twice it relates to Eve here in Genesis 2, being the helper of Adam. On every other occasion except once, it is used of God being the helper of His people. Psalm 27: *You have been my Helper, do not reject me or forsake me, O God, my Savior.* We shouldn’t see the word helper as someone who is an assistant, who is subordinate to us, lest we think of God that way. What it is saying is that there is indispensability of one to the other, female to male, male to female. It speaks of the indispensability of God to His people. You are my Helper, O God. We can’t function without Him.

It is only when sin came into the world, in Genesis 3, that its effects put this relationship asunder. The fall cuts through the righteousness that God had created in the garden. When God asked Adam what happened, he says, *“The woman you put here with me – she gave me some of the fruit of the tree and I ate it.”* Don’t blame me God; it was the woman. And if that isn’t enough to get me off the hook, *“It’s the woman you gave me.”* John Piper says, *“This is the beginning of all domestic violence, all wife abuse, all rape, all sexual slurs, and all the ways men belittle women whom God created in his own image.”*

Eve, of course, is no better. She blamed the serpent. *“The serpent deceived me and I ate,”* she said to God. We know that God pronounces a curse on the man and woman and it has to do with pain and sweat and death, and so on. In other words, the result of the fall is going to be conflict between the sexes. John Piper says, *“There will be dominating men who will want to rule over you, as women, and there will be devious women who want to manipulate for their own ends.”*

This began in the garden, but it was not what God created; that was not His plan. So when God says to Eve, *“Your desire will be to your husband, and he will rule over you,”* we see the consequence of the fall. That was not God’s original intent. That was the beginning of the breakdown of all relationships. It’s only when God comes in, as He redeems, He can bring that relationship back and creation will get restored.

If Greta Thunberg is concerned about the apparent apathy of the world through the challenge of climate change, well, at the heart, it’s a heart issue.

- Thirdly, it’s a sovereignty/responsibility issue, because it brings us again back to the challenges that we have in the world today. Man alone is made in God’s image, and man alone was mandated to rule over creation.

2:15 – *Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

Our mandate was to take care of it. Man was placed as God’s regent for creation, and that mandate has never been rescinded, never been taken back even though, because of the fall, there is now an antagonism between nature and man. A lot of hype that we see today about the environment comes because we’ve lost that sense of order. Man is

the caretaker on God's behalf. And yes, we have messed it up. We have abused it. We have not acted as honest caretakers. Part of the reason is the fall

But it's also the fact that because we have forgotten the order of the universe, we forget that God is overall sovereign, and then He put man. Today there is a danger to also invert it and put nature on top. So we become children of the cosmos, as Carl Sagan would say. And yet, if we are a random accident, we are just children of cosmic dust, then why should one person's rights trump another? Why should nature be over mine or mine over nature if there's no overarching order that has been created and put there?

Ronald Dworkin, a non-Christian philosopher, says, "If we want to defend rights, we must try to discover something beyond utility that argues for those rights." It only makes sense if there is a Creator and a created order. And while we have failed many times at all the challenges we face today, even as we look at issues of abortion and bioethics, and so on, it comes back to this: God created an order and He created a sequence. And when we change that, then we interrupt it. But God calls us back, and it's through His love and through His change of our hearts – it's when our hearts are re-ordered with His, then these things will fall into place.

### **Where do we go from here?**

The Bible has often been summed up as a drama in four acts:

- Creation
- Fall
- Redemption
- Restoration

We've seen Act 1, and we have seen Act 2 at the Cross. Today, you and I live in Act 3. But like every play, each act has its clues to the acts that follow.

As we look at the whole storyline of Christianity, we see that it's not just God came to save us from our sins and take us to heaven, but that we are part of a grand story that God is acting out. Tim Keller says, "The purpose of Jesus' coming is to put the whole world right, to renew and restore creation, not to escape it."

God is redeeming creation today as well. yes, He saves us, but He also redeems creation. And creation, as Paul says, waits for that day when it will be released from its bondage. He didn't come just to bring personal forgiveness, but to bring justice and shalom or peace to this world. The work of the Spirit of God is not only to save our souls, although that's immensely important, but it's also for us to care and cultivate the earth.

So, as we live in a time of challenge, Christianity uniquely offers hope to the world that we are in. God could have taken us out the day that we were saved. But He kept us here for a reason. As Paul writes to Timothy, He doesn't give us a spirit of fear. If you and I are here today, we are called to be a part of this restoration. We look forward to that day when He is going to complete it. There will be complete restoration, but till then, we are here with a purpose. And as we can understand the big picture, we need to be responsible and play our part where God has put us.

Greta is right to be concerned. But she is looking for the answers in all the wrong places. As Christians, we serve a God who is in control today a God who has promised a new heaven



and earth, and who has given us a foretaste of that certainty through the resurrection. So, you and I can go to work tomorrow, or wherever God has placed us, with the confidence that He holds the future. He is in control and we have the answers for the world that is asking for them. How will you and I respond?

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you Lord, that Your word is the same, that Your purposes are eternal and Your power is unchanging. Lord, we thank You for placing us in this time of history, in this place or geography, and in this season. Lord, we pray that we, as Your people, would have a real sense of Your plan and Your purpose. I pray that we would have confidence in Your power, that we would go out as testimonies of a living God, a God who loves this world, who cares for this world, who died for this world. Lord, I pray that You would give us strength that You would give us courage, that You would give us wisdom and endurance. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.