

27TH SEPTEMBER 2020

FERINTOSH PARISH CHURCH

WORSHIP AT HOME



www.ferintoshparishchurch.org.uk

"Long before time began, or space was created, God had written upon His heart the names of His elect people."

(C. H. Spurgeon)

PSALM 8

1 How excellent in all the earth,
Lord, our Lord, is thy name!
Who hast thy glory far advanc'd
above the starry frame.

2 When I look up unto the heav'ns,
which thine own fingers fram'd,
Unto the moon, and to the stars,
which were by thee ordain'd;

3 Of thy hands' works thou mad'st him lord,
all under's feet didst lay;
All sheep and oxen, yea, and beasts
that in the field do stray;

4 Fowls of the air, fish of the sea,
all that pass through the same.
How excellent in all the earth,
Lord, our Lord, is thy name!

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, our faith is in thee, our expectation is from thee, our love goes out toward thee, we believe thee, accept thy word, acquiesce in thy will, rely on thy promises, trust thy providence. We bless thee that the court of conscience proves us to be thine. We do not need signs and wonders to believe, for thy Word is sure truth.

We have cast our anchor in the port of peace, knowing that present and future are in nail-pierced hands. Thou art so good, wise, just holy, that no mistake is possible to thee. Thou art fountain and source of all law; what thou commandest is ours to obey. We yield to thy sovereignty all that we have; do thou with us as thou wilt. Thou hast given us silence in our hearts in place of murmurings and complaints. Keep our wishes from growing into willings, our willings from becoming fault-finding with thy providences, and have mercy on us, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

(Prayer from 'A collection of puritan prayers')

LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE READINGS

GENESIS 1: 1 (NKJV)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

ROMANS 1: 16 - 23 (NKJV)

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,
23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

SERMON

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). In the Hebrew canon, the name of the Bible's first book is derived from its first word meaning, "In the beginning." This was a fitting title, because as the Latin Vulgate heading 'Genesis' indicates, it is the book of origins. Here we are told by God about the beginning of the universe and of history. If we want to understand the world, the meaning of life, the nature of our own selves, the salvation for which we hope, and the destiny awaiting us in the end, the origin of all these is recorded in Genesis.

These opening words form the initial basis for a Christian worldview. That there was a beginning means that things have not always been. Matter and life have a definite beginning, and by identifying that origin we learn vital truths about them. Little children ask, "where did we come from?" Even at a young age we realise that where we come from says much about who we are. In its opening sentence, Genesis answers this important question. "In the beginning," says Genesis 1:1, prompting the question, which it immediately answers, "God."

Here we confront one of the most titanic claims in the entire Bible. If there was a beginning? what was already there at the beginning? The Scriptures answer, "God was there." "The cause of everything is the creative, powerful, and sovereign hand of almighty God." Francis Schaefer notes the significance: "Christianity as a system does not begin with Christ as Saviour, but with the infinite-personal God who created the world in the beginning." God the Creator is a truth that precedes God the Redeemer.

It is here that the Bible presents an answer at the very point that secular science does not. We ask, what was the true and first cause of all that there is? and science has no answer. There was a "singularity," science muses vaguely. But what caused the singularity? we ask, and only silence is heard. Science has nothing to see and point to as the source behind all things.

The Bible's first verse claims that there is a single being who does not have a beginning: God. In the beginning, God already was. God is the source of all things. This statement is staggering in its implications. A beginning indicates a direction and future. Since the beginning indicates a trajectory, if God was in the beginning then He created not only the beginning but determined its direction. If the cause and source of history is a person, as the Bible reveals about God, then the purpose of creation and the meaning of life is shaped by Him who made it all. Already in Genesis 1:1, therefore, we encounter the reality that Moses put so beautifully in Psalm 90:

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God (Ps. 90:2).

Genesis 1:1 declares God not only as the source of all things but as the subject of the Bible that will follow. G. Ch. Aalders writes: "The first words of Scripture purposely lift our hearts on high to God. In this way it becomes apparent from the outset that Holy Scripture, in its very nature, **is the revelation of God. And first of all, the revelation of God as Creator.**"

The claim that in the beginning God already was, points out that God is not Himself a part of the creation. In this way, Genesis 1:1 stands against pantheism, the popular view that God is all and all is God. Instead, the Bible claims that there is God the Creator and there is the creation. They are not one and the same. God is apart from His creation. His being exists outside of the rocks, rivers and trees. The world with all the things in it is not eternal but is created. God alone is eternal, absolutely free above all that is.

Reading that God was in the beginning provides the greatest comfort to the Christian, especially when we pray to God in time of need. God is involved and invested in the creation, otherwise we would not have Genesis 1:1. At the same time, God is exalted above the creation. He who was before is also after and above. His will, which formed the universe, is not constrained by any created power. This realisation grounded the hope of Psalm 121: "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:1-2).

The Creator's help is one that cannot be thwarted by anything in this world. The apostle Paul likewise grounds his assurance in God's supremacy over all creation: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

The final statement of Genesis 1:1 is that in the beginning God "created the heavens and the earth." The particular word used for "create" is a seldom-used term that always refers to God's activity in making things from nothing. In Genesis chapter 1, this word is used three times: in verse 1 for the creation of all things, in verse 21 when God created the living creatures, and in verse 27 when God created man in His own image.

Genesis describes what theologians refer to as creation *ex nihilo*, that is, creation out of nothing. Christians do not believe the absurd proposition that something came from nothing. We believe that God, who has always been, created all things where there had been nothing but Himself. Only God can create in this way, never man. The distinction is between making things out of existing material, as for instance a carpenter makes a chair, and that of creating the wood itself that will become the chair. The writer of Hebrews identifies creation by God out of nothing as a cardinal article of Christian faith: "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible" (Heb. 11:3).

Genesis 1 will detail the creation and forming of the material universe, which is why verse 2 focuses on "the earth" separately from the heavens. But from the beginning, God created all that is, including the spiritual realms. No doubt, from the perspective of the original hearers of Genesis, "the heavens and the earth" encompassed both the material and spiritual realms. Looking around them, they saw the rocks, hills, and streams. Looking up they saw not only light from the distant stars, but they imagined the heavenly realms of glory that even today the strongest telescope cannot perceive.

To say that God created all things rules out the theory that matter came into being by chance. But Genesis chapter 1 will also make clear that verse 1 launches a highly developed creative process that shapes and forms all things. Therefore, not only broad categories like matter and time were created by God, but actual planets, molecules, laws of nature, and definitions of life. What God created, He also formed. This is true not only for physical laws but also for moral laws. The Ten Commandments are just as fixedly created as are the laws of nature. Realising God's created design is increasingly essential in today's culture.

We hear today that gender is a social construct, whereas Genesis says that God created man "male and female" (Gen. 1:27). Our courts may decree that marriage licenses must be issued to any kind of romantic relationship, but Genesis 2 will teach that God created marriage between a man and a woman. There is right and wrong, life and death, male and female, good and evil because of God's sovereign design in creation. We reject these created distinctions not only to our peril but to the great offense of the living God who created them as a reflection of His own character as a God of truth.

We have noted that the words, "In the beginning," show that there is a history that began long ago and of which we are still a part. There is a trajectory and a story that Genesis 1:1 announces. The great question to ask is "What is that story?" If we wonder, we should ask the original audience to which the book of Genesis was written. The Bible tells us that Genesis was written by Moses during the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt. Therefore, when we read the words, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," we should imagine the people of Israel walking upon the desert earth, gazing up at the million shining lights of the blazing heavens which God had made. God made all the glory shining down on them, as well as the good earth of the land to which they were dwelling. Their story looked back to God's creation and then to man's sin and the misery and death it produced. But their story also looked forward to a Saviour, who was also part of God's original design, to the lamb slain "before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:19).

It is no wonder, then, that the New Testament Gospel message begins in language that deliberately echoes Genesis 1:1. Moses began the story of creation, from which sin and redemption would emerge, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The apostle John, centuries later, opened the gospel story of the new creation in deliberate echo, speaking of Jesus Christ, "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn. 1:1). In this way we are reminded that to begin the Bible is to relish the story it tells, the terrible problem it defines, and the marvellous solution it offers from God. Beginning in Genesis 1:1, we learn about God, creation, and history, and from there begin to learn about ourselves, sin, death, and salvation. Just as the Israelites who first heard the message of Genesis were a people moving forward to a saving encounter with God's Messiah, so too should we read Genesis as a beginning of our meeting with God, for salvation through the Saviour He has appointed to come to us in our need, the Redeemer Jesus Christ.

HYMN

To God be the glory
Great things He has done
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin
And opened the life-gate that all may go in

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord
Let the earth hear His voice
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord
Let the people rejoice
Come to the Father
Through Jesus the Son
Give Him the glory
Great things He has done*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood
To every believer the promise of God
The vilest offender who truly believes
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives
(Refrain)

Great things He has taught us, great things He
has done And great our rejoicing through Jesus
the Son But purer, and higher, and greater will
be Our wonder, our worship, when Jesus we see
(Refrain)

PRAYER

O Holy Father, you have freely given your Son,
O Divine Son, you have freely paid our debt,
O Eternal Spirit, you have freely bid us come,
O Triune God, you freely grace us with salvation.

We marvel that the finite can know the infinite,
Here a little, afterwards in full-orbed truth;
Now we know but a small portion of what
we shall know,
Here in part, there in perfection,
Here a glimpse, there a glory.
To enjoy thee is life eternal,
And to enjoy is to know.
Keep us in the freedom of experiencing
your salvation continually,
We pray in Jesus Name, Amen.

(Prayer from 'A collection of puritan prayers')

BENEDICTION

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all this day and forevermore, Amen.

WORSHIP UPDATE



It is now over 6 months since we last gathered for worship at Ferintosh Parish Church. So much has taken place since then and the world we were used to will be different from now on.

Given the necessary restrictions imposed on us all and the limits on numbers able to gather it is not possible for us to meet as a congregation and this position is likely to last for a number of months yet.

In order that when we are able to meet as a congregation we do so safely and in a controlled manner a small group of our Kirk Session Elders are working on plans and risk assessments for the use of our church and hall. This work is a requirement of Ross Presbytery in order that any use of a church building has been given proper consideration. These plans and assessments will be important to have for the point where the Government and Presbytery consider it possible for congregations to meet subject to certain limits and behaviour.

The Kirk Session has met on two occasions on-line to approve the plans and risk assessments which are now being considered by Presbytery. Work is now underway to determine the feasibility of opening the church under the current restrictions. A trial of recording worship from within the church will take place from 27th September for a number of weeks. This will be made available on-line.

In the meantime, there will be a video of the sermon preached from the church placed on our Facebook page. This will be available each week along with the WAH material for the foreseeable future.

Please continue to support those around you and share the Worship at Home with friends or neighbours.