



Sermon Growth Guide

August 23, 2020

The Beautiful Story – Beautiful World

Genesis 1:14-25

Key Verse: Genesis 1:25

“God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.”

Big Idea: God made the world abundantly beautiful for you.

Foundations

Welcome to week two of *The Beautiful Story* where we are learning and reflecting on the Kingdom truth that God made the world abundantly beautiful for us. God's love is why the earth is filled with so much beauty.

The world in which we live has fallen from its original beauty and balance, but we can still see it. We can still see a created order rife with intent to house humanity graciously, and full of opportunities to open our hearts with its beauty.

Scripture proclaims that the child of God is united to Christ. Within this union is the fulfillment of the greatest desire of the human heart, to be united to beauty itself.

Open and close your time of further study and application in prayer. Ask the Spirit of God to guide and guard your time in His Word.

Understanding God's Word

This week our passage describes days three and four of God's creation, as well as the first half of day six.

What's your favorite act of creation in Genesis 1:14-25? Why?

Imagine what the world was like at the end of Genesis 1:25. What comes to mind?

Applying God's Word

This week we learn that God made the world abundantly beautiful for us. God loves beauty and delights in providing a beautiful world for you.

In what practical way can you apply this kingdom truth to your week?

Witnessing God's Word

The people of God are compelled to share God's love and salvation. Think of one person who does not yet walk closely with the Lord and who would be blessed to hear that God made the world abundantly beautiful for them. Take a moment to close your time by praying for that person. Discern an action step you can take in moving toward this person with the love of Christ.

If I were put in charge of creation, I think there would be about five different kinds of birds. Maybe six, if I felt energetic. A big one. A little one. A colorful one. One that eats dead stuff—because that seems necessary. One dedicated to eating only mosquitoes. That might be it. I mean, that covers it. Right? A study in 2016 by the American Museum of Natural History said there are at least 18,000 species of birds. 18,000. That's a lot of kinds of birds. How many species of fish do you need? A dozen, maybe. How about 32,000 species of fish? How about flowers? There's about half a billion different flowers. Seems a lot. Frankly isn't that kind of a waste? Doesn't that all seem a little excessive? Think about all the flowers that grow, blossom, wilt and die without anyone ever seeing them. What a waste!

The word is gratuitous. Gratuitous. We are talking about The Beautiful Story, the story of everything. It starts with a beautiful God who makes a beautiful creation, and this Creator God is gratuitous with beauty. Obscenely profligate with diversity. Excessively abundant with colors and varieties and forms and types and ... an endless array of generous delights. Look at that thing! Yeah, but see this one! Why? Why did God make it beautiful? You might think beauty is incidental. It doesn't need to be pretty; it just needs to be useful and serve a purpose. God seems to think differently. If you think only in terms of what is useful and functional, you will find yourself in a narrow little world. The Beautiful World made by the beautiful God is there to open things up. To make life bigger. Ultimately to help you feel God's love—God's extravagant, wasteful, excessive love for you.

We pick up on day four of creation, verse 14: "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the

sky to give light on the earth.' And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars" (Genesis 1:14-16). He also made the stars. Just ... you know. There are 10 billion galaxies in the observable universe. Each one has an average of 100 billion stars. What does it do to you when you look up into the stars in the night sky? It should make you feel small. It should also make you feel loved. In all that vastness, God sees and knows and loves you, small as you are, in the middle of it all.



God says let there be lights. Sun and moon and stars. They become the basis for the calendar, the change in seasons, the counting of years, the navigation of the surface of the earth, and on and on. People sometimes deride Genesis, right? This ancient worldview, so ignorant. Every time I study it, I fall out of my chair at how the Spirit inspired these words. If you asked Moses, he probably believed the sun and moon flew across the sky like arrows. He probably believed stars were pinpricks in some heavenly covering. He didn't say any of those things. That's not what got inked on Holy Scripture. Amazing to me how the Spirit of God inspires the Word. The Sun and Moon and Stars are in the vault of the sky in the sense that their light is in the sky, their light—great lights—that's what we see and interact with, their light. Amazing. Beautiful.

Let me make one more point before leaving verse 14. "Let them serve as signs," God says. "Let them serve." These heavenly bodies are there to serve us. They are there to serve. As the world is created, we see God making decision after decision after decision, countless decisions, and they are all to serve us, to make the

world inhabitable for us, to make this world a comfortable place to house us. Scientists call it the Anthropic Principle and many don't know what to do with it, but the universe itself displays a bias toward hosting human life. Every balance of chemical and biochemical reaction, the tilt of the planet, the course of the earth's trajectory around the sun, the sun itself and its particular makeup and consistency of heat and light, the pace of rotation of the earth ... I could go on and on. And you can go up or down, all the way out into galactic terms and all the way down into microbes and chromosomes and particles. It all displays a bias to host human life. A beautiful God made a beautiful world for us.

It's a world filled with life. "And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.' So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:20-21). God loves beauty, majesty, delicate functionality, and God loves diversity. Just look at all the animals in the world. A few years ago there was a movie that nobody watched—it flopped. But it's a great movie. The Big Year with Steve Martin, Jack Black, Owen Wilson playing professional bird watchers taking part in an annual contest to see how many species of bird they can spot in a 365-day period. Fun movie. It gives you a glimpse of the range of diversity in creation. Those great nature shows and Planet Earth and all that. There's no end to the breadth and diversity and range and little tricks. Each animal has its purpose, and if we are willing to learn, something to teach us. The ant works

diligently in community. The bee stores away for future needs. The fish know their path to run, whales know how to get back to their breeding grounds. On and on it goes with lessons built in. Every little creature has its purpose in the system, but also has some little bit to teach us. Nothing is without purpose and usefulness, and all of it with some kind of beauty.

We learn from plants too, you know. Every plant has some good use—food, medicine, oil. We learn a lot from plants. Some of my deepest existential moments have been in my own backyard staring at my weak, dried-out patchy grass! Why Lord? Think about how many times Jesus used a metaphor about some plant or tree or something. "Then Jesus asked, 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches'" (Luke 13:18-19). The faith like a mustard seed. Very small. Very small faith. So small you might miss it. So small if you dropped it, you'd lose it. Very small. It's enough. When the faith is placed in Jesus—it's enough. That's the same chapter where we get a different kind of encouragement. "Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down'"

(Luke 13:6-9). You know, sometimes we think it's all over for us. Like a tree that just won't cut it, just won't survive, just won't bear



fruit. Jesus says it's never too late. God can make a change. The Spirit can dig around in the root bed. It might take a while for the renewal to come, up from the soil, up from the roots all the way out to the ends of the branches. But God is rooting around in the soil of your heart, and healthy change is on the way. We learn from plants. We learn from animals.

God loves what He made. God is extravagant in the creation of beauty. So extravagant it seems wasteful! Beautiful birds live and die with no one ever seeing them. Flowers open up and blossom on ridges high in the Alps, and no eye beholds them. Why should the earth be filled with such beauty? God loves beauty and wanted it that way. I like to imagine alternative universes, or alternative creations. God could have made the world with no fixed or regular qualities. Gravity could vary day to day. Boy, gravity is heavy today, don't you think? Yeah, and it's leaning a little left this morning. That's really going to cause some problems. Water could sometimes be penetrable and sometimes impenetrable. Sometimes freeze at 32 degrees, but sometimes at 80 degrees. You jump in the pool—bam! Any host of things. I think it's fun to imagine. But I used to love watching Star Trek, so maybe that's just me. It could have been different on this world. Life could be a sterile experiment in a pallid environment, like mold growing on a petri dish in a lab. God made all sorts of decisions about creation, countless decisions, literally beyond measure or understanding how many decisions God made in creation. Each and every decision God made was to make us feel at home, confident and loved in this world. The world in which we live has fallen from its original beauty and balance, but we can still see it. We can still see a created order full of divine intent to house humanity graciously, and full of beauty. God made a beautiful world.

All of this is heading somewhere. Next

week we will see. This earth is for someone. It's prepared for inhabitants. Not just squirrels. Not just trout. Us. The world is a staging ground and a schoolhouse, a platform for education. It's a school for souls. A place to learn, or fail to learn, the eternal lessons. A gentle breeze, the delicate flower, the way the sunlight hits the mountains. It's not an accident. It's all there to teach you something, to say something to you. Can you hear it? We talk about earth as a schoolhouse for souls—listen, pastor, I need a schoolhouse for kids! How about one of those? I know. When I heard this week about college football, I almost threw in the towel! That's it. 2020 wins. I'm out! No matter how sour life gets, no matter how hard or hopeless or frustrating it gets, you can't turn your head in this world God made without being hit by some form of beauty.

C. S. Lewis said in an essay called *The Weight of Glory*, this beauty is meant to move us. We see it, but Lewis says, "We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it." Why did Jesus do so much pointing at nature? Consider the lilies of the field. Look. See. A beautiful God has made a beautiful world—and you have a place in it. Jesus, remember, Jesus is the one who knows just how ugly it all can be. Jesus is the one who took on our ugliness, who became our ugliness, so that we could become beauty.

