

IT WAS VERY GOOD

Genesis 1:26-2:3

Lesson 2

Key Verse: 1:31a

"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them in six days. First, he prepared an environment which would sustain life. He shined light into darkness; he brought order out of formless chaos; he filled the empty world with life. He did everything necessary to provide an environment in which man could live an abundant and fruitful life. On the sixth day, first, he created living creatures--the wild animals and livestock, all the animals that inhabit the ground. God looked at each act of creation and saw that it was good. Then he turned his attention to the crown and glory of his creation, man.

1. God created man (26,27)

In verse 26 God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." God did not make man in an aimless, haphazard way. He made a plan to create man in his own image. His purpose in creating man in his own image was to make man the steward and shepherd of his world. God has a good purpose for creating every man. God still creates individual people with a plan for their lives in his mind. Psalm 139:13-18 says: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made...When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be..." Ephesians 2:10 says: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Verse 27 is poetry. This verse tells us how God carried out his plan: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." We can learn two things about man's nature from these verses.

First, man was created on the sixth day, the same day that the animals were created. So man shares the physical nature and the limits of the animals. He must eat and sleep; he gives birth to children like himself; he is confined to the

limits of time and space. **Second**, man has a spiritual nature. Man has an animal nature, and at the same time he has an artistic, creative, God-nature. He has a spiritual nature; He was created to have fellowship with God. We human beings resemble God. God is love; we also can love with spiritual love. God is holy; there is something holy about us--so we should respect ourselves and we should respect others. God is almighty; man also has limitless possibilities. God rules over all things; man also has the ability to rule. We can pray. We can make decisions based on values and principles. We can know God. God did not want the animal nature to rule us; he wanted us to be spiritual men and women. And he created us to grow. The perfect man was not stagnant--he was a growing man. The hope of God's children is to become more and more like God, to grow more and more in his image (Ro 8:29; Lk 2:40,52)

2. God gave man mission (28)

God created man for mission. His mission was to rule over— to take care of— the world God had created. So, God gave him the ability to think and reason, to make plans and decisions and to carry them out. He can operate a computer, build an airplane, explore outer space. Man created in God's image has the ability to do God's work. A man without a mission from God cannot be a complete human being. When God created man, God's work was waiting for him.

Man's mission, however, did not come automatically or naturally; it came from God's word of blessing and command: "God blessed them and said to them, `Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" (28) To rule over and subdue means to cultivate the earth and take care of it. It means to be a shepherd for all living things and a steward of the world. Man must take care of the world as a mother takes care of her home and children. Man must take care of the world as a shepherd takes care of his flock. This means that man has a mandate to explore and learn about and understand the world so that he can help all creation fulfill God's good purpose and glorify God. The door is open for all of the academic disciplines; man must study and learn about himself and about God's world if he is to be good a steward. Man's academic pursuits must be for the glory of God--not for the glory of man.

To be fruitful is a blessing. To be fruitful and increase in number meant to have children and populate the earth. Mankind has indeed populated the earth. But we can see that in a fallen world, man's greatest need is for spiritual rebirth. God's people must work to bring men back to God so that they can obey him and have spiritual life. Jesus gave us the great commission and told us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He restored mankind's mission. God created each person for mission. If a man does not have any mission from

God, then his life is miserable and without meaning. He only lives for himself. No one is more miserable than a person who can find no meaning in his life. And until a person knows God and receives his mission from God, he can do nothing that is good in God's eyes. Each of us must study God's word and pray until we know God personally and receive the mission he has for each of us.

Paradise was not a place for lazy people to loll around. It was a place of hard work. If man would fulfill his mission, he must work. A person who doesn't like to work is giving up his rights as a human being. The 4th commandment says "Six days shall you labor and do all your work..." It is a great thing for a man to fulfill the mission that God has given him. Mission makes a man great. David's greatness did not lie in the fact that he was a king or that he had great ability. He was great because he served the will of God in his time. (Acts 13:36) Jesus' life key verse was Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." These days, people look at a man who has a mission from God and is committed to serve him, as though he were strange. But God makes men great by giving them his work to do. No matter what we are called to do, we must not let what other people think of us influence us too much. We must seek to accomplish the mission that has been given us by God.

3. Creation Order

God is the Sovereign Creator. He made man in his image and commanded him to rule over the rest of creation. So there was a clear, harmonious spiritual order built into the universe. God is first, mankind is just a little lower than God, but ruling over the created world. Mankind was elevated to a position above the rest of creation by God's mandate to take care of the world. Psalm 8:4-8 says, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim in the paths of the seas." (4-8) This order of creation was established to make a beautiful world that would glorify God. In the context of this spiritual order there is real freedom for man, for there is freedom to grow and freedom to love. There is no freedom in chaos.

Only when man keeps his position as servant of God and steward of creation can he be a true man. When he allows himself to be controlled by material things or by his animal nature, then he slips down to the level of animals. He becomes flesh (Ge 6:3). When man fails to keep his position and falls to the animal level, God is very sorry. (6:5-8) It is man's sacred duty to keep his position as a human

being.

4. God provided food for man and animals (29-30)

Look at verses 29-30. When man was working hard, doing God's work, then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food." God provided vegetables and fruit as food for man and animals. There was no need to struggle for survival. Animals did not need to prey on each other. The lion and the lamb could lie down together. Man's only struggle was a joyous spiritual struggle to grow up in God's image. He must work hard to subdue and rule over and care for God's world. When man works hard to fulfill God's mission instead of working for himself, he is happy, and God provides what he needs for his physical life. Even in a fallen world, Jesus promised to provide what we need to eat and drink and wear. (Mt 6:33) When man ignores his mission and only struggles to survive, he becomes full of fear and his life becomes meaningless.

The problem of food is basic to man's life. Many people have assumed that if there were no food problem, there would be no real problem in the world. Everyone would live together in peace and happiness. Some economic theorists assume that the economic problem is man's fundamental problem, so if the economic problem is solved, all other problems will go away. Communism attempts to reduce man's problems to economics, and capitalism does the same. These theories both try to find solutions to man's basic problems, but both assume that the solution lies in the realm of material things. The Bible teaches us that God is the one who solves the economic problem, and he does so when creation order is established and maintained.

These verses also teach us that God is the giver of abundant material things, and he wants mankind to be thankful. When we are thankful for God's gifts, there is no room for complaints.

5. It was good (31)

Read verse 31. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day." God created the world to please and glorify himself. Every creature is created for the glory of God. On the first five days of creation God made all things. On the sixth day he made man. As he created the heaven and the earth and all things, we are told that after each day's work, "God saw that it was good." But when he finished creating man, and putting him in his position as the steward of the world, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." The adverb "very" is added. This verse tells us

that God was pleased, not only with each individual part of his creation, but also with the harmony and beauty of the whole. Creation order is beautiful. When God is first, and in sovereign control, man is working hard as a steward of creation and all the material world is controlled by man, for the glory of God, then God is glorified and man is happy. Furthermore, when I discover myself in God's will and providence, I can know who I am. I exist because God created me. And I am here by the will and providence of God who created heaven and earth. I have come from God and I am going back to God. Each of us has his own unique individuality in God; we know clearly where we came from and where we are going.

When we deeply accept our own creaturehood and God's sovereignty and seek to glorify God, we can live joyful and meaningful lives. Each of us must accept himself as God's good creation. We must not hate ourselves or despise the way we look or the talents and abilities God has given us. And we must deeply respect other people. God has created each of us for a good purpose. When we accept ourselves as God accepts us, and see others as God sees them, we can begin to grow and to discover the good purpose God has for each of us.

What is "good"? God is the one who sets the standards. He is the Creator, and he knows how his creation must function. The Bible is the "Owner's Manual." We study it to find out who God is and what duty he expects of us. We must accept his moral standards and his value system in order to live according to truth, and in order to be truly happy in his world.

The first question of the Shorter Catechism is, "What is man's chief end?" The answer is, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." Indeed, God created us for his own glory, and our lives have purpose and meaning when we come to know God and glorify him. God made us to be happy. But apart from him, we cannot be really satisfied. When I realize that God made me and was very pleased, then new possibilities appear for a wonderful self-discovery and great self-fulfillment. I began to find the real joy of being human.

5. Real rest (2:1-3)

God gave man the Sabbath (2:1-3). God worked hard for six days. We human beings must also work hard. But God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on that day God rested. He gave the Sabbath to man as a day of rest. The special characteristic of our times is tiredness. So Christians must keep the Sabbath holy and on that day have deep fellowship with God. This is the only real rest.

The Sabbath is a day especially blessed by God. It is a holy day. "Holy" means "set apart" or "different." God set the Sabbath day apart from all the rest of his creation and gave it to man as a day of fellowship with God. If there are no rests in music, the music cannot be beautiful. In the same way, the day of rest is necessary to man. The only real rest that a person can have is rest in God. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." We must prepare for and someday enter the eternal Sabbath rest that God has prepared for us.

When we work for God's mission and rest in God, accepting his loving sovereignty in our lives, we are full of the joy of living.