

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:1-8

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. 6 Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." 7 Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.”

"Waters Above & Waters Below"

We come now to the second day of creation and it seems to be a day that gets very little attention from the commentators and this is a bit strange when you consider it is when God brings forth the vastness of space! It is, of course, very timely to have our discussion come on Ascension Sunday when we celebrate the fact that Jesus bodily ascended from earth to the Father's throne in the highest heaven.

- **So we will consider the heavens we can see & explore, and also what the Bible calls the highest heavens where Jesus sits enthroned!**

We will talk briefly about what we know of the waters above the firmament, the vastness of space and most importantly what it should mean to us today in our modern world. Over the next two weeks, Lord willing, we will see the earth and seas formed from the waters below and the expanse of space filled with the sun moon & stars.

- **As we do, I want us to ponder just how many new & exciting mysteries we are discovering with our modern explorations as we reach further into space on the one hand, & delve deeper into the oceans on the other!**

You see, our modern science in many ways is giving us the ability to see and appreciate much more of what God has done in the early days of creation. Things that the Saints who have gone before believed as mysteries, but that we can more & more see with our eyes.

So let us begin our study of the second day with the word firmament: The Hebrew word used here implies a covering and something spacial: A good word for Outer space today?

The description is given in Psalm 104 which is a review of God's creation. Here we read, “1 Bless Jehovah, O my soul! O Jehovah my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty, 2 Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.”

- **So we have an expansive cover!**

Now this presents us with two challenging concepts for us in our modern world... First, we are still in day two, so what is this vast expanse covering? It covers the waters below which on Day Three will become the earth and seas as we know them today. We must also remember that none of the other heavenly bodies were placed into this expanse until Day Four. Thus we have a very strong indication that we truly are at the center of God's activities outside of the highest heaven.

- **Am I saying that the earth is the center of the universe?**

If by universe one means ALL that God created on Day One then I would think we should argue that God's throne in the highest heaven is the center!

- **It is certainly the center of authority according to the Book of Revelation!**

However, on Day Six we will see man made in the image of God and given dominion over all the earth... God's authority delegated to man on the earth! Now I am sure that a modern skeptic listening to this series is going to be saying at this point, "wow, Pastor Stoos has really dug himself into a BIG hole now, what is he going to argue next: That the world is flat?"

- NO, I am not going to return to that Greek myth that was given up in the 4th Century BC!

I am also not going to argue that this firmament or covering is a dome upon which God placed all the stars which some early Christians believed!

- Remember, we said last week that we would never find the Bible in conflict with true science.

So what do I mean when I say that Day Two seems to indicate that our little planet is at the center of God's activities as it is ruled by man as God's vice regent?

- I would argue that earth is at the center in terms of both its authority and its spacial location.

Regarding the first, it is clearly a delegated authority because all true authority resides with God. We will talk much more about this when we come to Day Six and the creation of man in God's image.

So does the earth have to be at the exact center of the known universe? Not necessarily: Consider this...

Those who believe that America is now one large nation as opposed to a union of sovereign states would certainly argue that the center of America is Washington DC and they would believe this in terms of both authority and physical presence.

- In other words, in their minds everything revolves around Washington DC.

They would see it as the center even though it is not physically in the center of our nation. That is what I would argue is implied from the activity of the second day and again on the fourth day when God fills this great expanse with the sun, moon and stars.

- The center of God's activities under heaven will be the earth!

Now the charge will come that we are being just plain arrogant and proud! Thanks to modern astronomy we now believe there are billions of stars and many solar systems which might support life. How can we claim that our earth is the center of God's activities and imply that there is no life anywhere else?

Again, we are trusting the one who was there and told us what happened! We are given no information about what God is doing in the vastness of space but we know it is all for His glory and dare I say for His pleasure? I am sure that many of you have seen the incredible pictures and artist renditions brought to us from the Hubbell space telescope. We have been able to observe these wonders only very recently, & yet God has enjoyed them since He placed them in the heavens thousands of years ago.

We should not be able to view any of those photos without thinking of Psalm 19 which begins by saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God; & the firmament shows His handiwork."

- As I said, the more we discover with our modern advances, the more we confirm the truth of God's Word which was the goal of early Christian Science in the first place.

The same is true as we probe the depths of the sea learning to see things that have never been seen below: We have found life where the light of the sun has never penetrated and yet they are full of vibrant colors... There for God's enjoyment all these years?

- Now that we can see them, we should give glory to their creator.

BUT, I have gotten ahead of myself, so we will look at more of this over the next two weeks!

This second day of creation presents another challenging concept which very few want to talk about...

Our text tells us that God said, “let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.”

On Day One we were told that the earth was without form and void and that the Spirit hovered over the deep. Here in Day Two there are waters that are to be divided and then on Day three we will see the water below formed into the earth and seas that we know today. I think I mentioned last week that one could certainly speculate that water is the basic building block or material that God has chosen to work with here in the early days of Creation!

It would certainly not surprise us with how we see water used so prominently in the Scriptures...

You of course have the seas on Day Three and then the four major rivers flowing from the Garden of Eden. You can follow the theme of women at wells all the way from Genesis to the Gospel According to John. Think of the glorious picture of the river flowing from the Temple seen by the Prophet Ezekiel and in the end, the river of life in Revelation.

- **And, of course we have the waters of Baptism from Moses to Peter.**
- **So IF the waters below are real waters, which we have no reason to believe they are anything else, then what about the waters above?**

Are we to believe that God took some of the water and placed it above the firmament that we know as outer space? That is certainly what the plain reading of the text would indicate.

And lest you think that I am becoming far too speculative in some of this I want you to know that just to be sure I was not running afoul of any true science, I ran my last sermon by a friend who is an astrophysicist, who obviously knows much more than I do!

He said I was on solid ground and appreciated the source where the secular crowd admits that light existed before the stars. He then offered an insight he has about that background radiation that I mentioned. I posited that it might be evidence for the creation of light, but my friend had a different take... He said in his note, “I’m speculating as much as anyone else here, but I tend to think of the microwave background as the border of the second heaven (it is the edge of our observable universe), with the radiation being light from the third heaven. Maybe the temperature of the crystal sea is 2.7 K?”

My friend is making reference to the crystal sea in heaven mentioned in Revelation and since 2.7K is about 270 degrees below zero in our common temperature scale it would certainly be solid and crystal like! As he said, it is speculation and may seem as silly to the Saints who study space a thousand years from now as the dome some believed in a thousand years ago seems to us.

However, it is refreshing to hear a Christian who is in the midst of the battles in the science fields today taking what the Scriptures have to say seriously, unlike many of the Bible commentators who should know better! They know that the Bible makes other references to the waters above, but quickly discount them because it makes them uncomfortable so they would rather continue to believe that the real history God is giving us here in Genesis is just some fancy poetry!

What I want to close with today are my thoughts on how the world view that we chose impacts the effect that this vast creation will have on us.

For the secular humanist, AND those liberal Bible commentators, the vastness of space can honestly only drive home the point that not only is our tiny planet pretty insignificant, but an individual life is also meaningless in the presence of this vast machine we call the universe.

For the Bible-believing Christian on the other hand, the more we discover about the vastness of the creation and the wonders that the Creator has brought forth...

Whether in a super-nova far away or the discovery of new life forms in the hostile depths of the sea...

We feel MORE significant as those made in the image of this Creator and special as a people whom this Creator loved enough to die for in order to save us from our sins.

- We see this over and over again in the Psalms and the writings of Paul but first I want to again contrast these Biblical truths with the darkness of unbelief.

Instead of turning to the dark philosophers like Russell or Nietzsche as we have in the past weeks, I want to use a much more popular source: The British comedy group, Monty Python... Of course I do not want what I share here to be any kind of endorsement for their movies!

- I use them only to demonstrate that the darkness of the humanist world view is not just present in the hidden corners of a university philosophy department.

The Python team is very talented and cynically deliver devastating blows to not only the Christian religion, but humanism as well and they do so with humor which makes them very popular and thus very dangerous. For example they use a song to bring the movie The Life of Brian to a close that has over seven million views on its YouTube link. The song is entitled "look on the Bright Side of Life" and has a catchy whistle that some of us may have used without realizing the source.

In the movie, the song is begun by a man who is one of over a hundred being crucified along with Brian... This man tells Brian as he is about to die a horrible death, to 'cheer up,' and as the song title implies, 'To look on the bright side of life.' As they all face certain death the song says in part:

"For life is quite absurd and death's the final word, You must always face the curtain with a bow. Forget about you sin, give the audience a grin. Enjoy it its your last chance anyhow, so always look on the bright side of life."

And of course if that is not enough, Brian's friend goes on to articulate the humanist world view brilliantly as the others whistle this silly tune: "You came from nothing, you are going back to nothing, so what have you lost? NOTHING! [Of course Disney is much classier with the circle of life in The Lion King, but it teaches the same nihilism.]

But, the Python group uses another song to make a similar point in the Meaning of Life, showing clearly how it impacts our decisions... [tell the background for Galaxy song]

"Whenever life gets you down, Mrs. Brown And things seem hard or tough And people are stupid, obnoxious or daft And you feel that you've had quite enough Just remember that you're standing on a planet that's evolving And revolving at nine hundred miles an hour ...The sun and you and me and all the stars that we can see Are moving at a million miles a day In an outer spiral arm, at forty thousand miles an hour Of the galaxy we call the 'milky way' Our galaxy itself contains a hundred billion stars It's a hundred thousand light years side to side It bulges in the middle, sixteen thousand light years thick But out by us, it's just three thousand light years wide We're thirty thousand light years from galactic central point We go 'round every two hundred million years And our galaxy is only one of millions of billions In this amazing and expanding universe. The universe itself keeps on expanding and expanding in all of the directions it can whizz as fast as it can go, the speed of light, you know Twelve million miles a minute and that's the fastest speed there is...So remember, when you're feeling very small and insecure how amazingly unlikely is your birth ..."

- The man in the refrigerator and the Galaxy song do their job and Mrs. Brown signs up for the live organ donor program.

I share these not to depress us and certainly not to promote Python's work...

But I think it is a good modern day reminder of just how lost our world is and how we must see these things with the same compassion we saw in our Savior Jesus... In Matthew's account we read this in chapter nine: "35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

- We are to be those who are sent as the laborers unto a needy people today.

We are called upon to help them not by running from the very Scriptures that will give them hope, but by telling them the truth about Jesus:

- Jesus, the one who has created all there is and made man in His image so we have real purpose & hope.

Those who discount what we read here in the early chapters of the Book of Beginnings lose the ability and real power to give an answer to our modern skeptics who say that science has all the answers...

We as Christians must once again proclaim the truth of God's Word, knowing that even those portions which might be tough to explain today, will in the due course of time come to show us even more of God's glory! We must tell our modern world that they do NOT need to fear being insignificant in the midst of a vast universe they call a machine...

- Rather we must call them to fear the One who created heaven and earth & come to Him in repentance!

To do so, we must have the confidence that only God's Word can give us... A confidence we will have ONLY if we trust that God is telling us the truth about everything that he reveals.

A truth that will ring true as we read and study these things throughout the Bible:

First with Moses...

Deuteronomy 10:12 " "And now, Israel, what does Jehovah your God require of you, but to fear Jehovah your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments of Jehovah and His statutes which I command you today for your good? 14 Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to Jehovah your God, also the earth with all that is in it.":

Then with King Solomon...

II Chronicles 6:17 "17 And now, O Lord God of Israel, let Your word come true, which You have spoken to Your servant David. 18 "But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!":

And after the exile...

Nehemiah 9: "And the Levites said: "Stand up and bless Jehovah your God Forever and ever! "Blessed be Your glorious name, Which is exalted above all blessing and praise! 6 You alone are Jehovah; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You."

AND very often in the Psalms...

Psalms 68:33 "To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which were of old! Indeed, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice. 34 Ascribe strength to God; His excellence is over Israel, And His strength is in the clouds. 35 O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places. The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God!"

And finally, consider the word of Psalm 148 which we will sing back to God in a moment:

“Praise Jehovah! Praise Jehovah from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! 2 Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! 3 Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light! 4 Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, And you waters above the heavens! 5 Let them praise the name of Jehovah, For He commanded and they were created...

11 Kings of the earth and all peoples; Princes and all judges of the earth; 12 Both young men and maidens; Old men and children. 13 Let them praise the name of Jehovah, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven.”

- **As we prepare to sing His praises and remember all we have thought about today that involved water; As we remember Jesus seated in the highest heaven above the waters above: We should remember the precious words He spoke in Jerusalem recorded for us in John 7:37:**

“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

Communion Meditation: Deuteronomy 10

“14 Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to Jehovah your God, also the earth with all that is in it. 15 Jehovah delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. 16 Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. 17 For Jehovah your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. 18 He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. 19 Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. 20 You shall fear Jehovah your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name. 21 He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. 22 Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now Jehovah your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude.”