

A Better Story – Creation (Psalm 104)

Intro – A Vastly Superior Spirit

In 1936, Albert Einstein wrote these words in a letter:

“Every one who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe - a spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble.”

Einstein never believed in a personal god, or that prayer could change anything. But as a scientist looking at the universe, he realised that there must be a spirit or force behind these complex natural laws. In this he agreed with the Bible. If we are humble, as he suggested, isn't it possible that there is a personal God behind the Universe?

Maybe you're listening today and don't believe in God. Now, imagine you drew a large circle representing all the knowledge in the world and history. Then you drew a small circle showing what you know personally. Wouldn't it be true that there is a vast majority of things you don't know? And isn't it possible that knowledge of a personal God is one of them? Today we look at the Bible's story of creation. And I hope we see that it's a better story than what the world provides. I hope we'll see that creation reflects the glory of God. That this God is in complete control of his creation. And that our place in creation is special. People are made in the image of God, and we find our purpose in praising him, for his glory.

1. Creation Reflects the Glory of God!

Like Einstein, the writer of Psalm 104 looks at creation, and praises the spirit behind it all. His introduction summarises the whole psalm:

Psalm 104:1 *Praise the LORD, my soul. LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.*

As we look at the creation – the stars and planets, the mountains and seas and winds, the trees and animals – we are humbled at how all of nature works together in a beautifully ordered system. V. 2 says that the LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment. God himself is invisible. He is Spirit. But as we look at what he has made, we can see the light of His glory and majesty. And he made the whole universe out of nothing; simply by speaking!

We think we're really intelligent and powerful because of all the things we can make. But everything we make comes from something that already exists. God made the whole universe *out of nothing*. This is scientifically impossible. Science says that the universe is a closed system. Matter cannot be created or destroyed – only changed. But the best theory we can come up with for the source of all matter in the universe, is the Big Bang. That everything started with an explosion from a single point source. Now we know that everything that exists must have a cause. But what caused the Big Bang? It's not eternal. It happened in a moment of time. So what caused it? See our best science points to a reality beyond itself, that it cannot explain, that

defies the very laws of science itself. The Bible says that the ultimate cause of all things, is a Creator. All this is meant to bring praise and glory to God.

Psalm 104:1 Praise the LORD, my soul. LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

This is really important in our me-centred world. We think all we need is humanity. We don't need God or a higher power. But the more we focus on ourselves, the more empty and hopeless we feel. History has shown that human beings always search for something greater than themselves. Something transcendent. We have eternity written in our hearts. And Psalm 104 is in no doubt that this greater being is God, the Creator. We are not the centre of the universe. God is.

At one time, people used to believe that the sun and all the planets revolved around the earth. It's so easy to believe that we are the centre of the universe. But in the 1500s Copernicus developed a model where the earth and planets orbited the Sun. This was a major shift in science and led to the Copernican revolution. We are not the centre of the universe, not even of our solar system.

We need the same kind of revolution in our personal lives. The universe and life doesn't revolve around us. We are not the most important beings in the universe. No, the stars and planets and all creation reflects the glory and majesty of God the Creator. We exist for him, not the other way around.

2. God is in Complete Control of His Creation

The second thing that flows out of God creating the world, is that he is in complete control of his creation. This psalm shows how effortlessly God controls every part of the universe. He controls the stars and the planets; the seas and the mountains. He makes the trees grow. He provides for all creatures, including people. He not only made everything from nothing, but he is intimately involved in sustaining every part of creation. We could not take another breath or step apart from his will.

We like to think that we are in control. We can build the biggest buildings, solve any problem, cure any disease, end poverty. But just one month in lockdown brought our economic system to its knees. If NSW goes into lockdown, it will cost us \$1.3 billion **per week!** How fragile our world is! How dependent our human systems. It shows us what the Bible has always taught: that we are not in control. But that every part of creation is *completely dependent* on the Creator.

Psalm 104:27-29 All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. ²⁸ When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. ²⁹ When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.

Now more than ever, people are realising that we need someone in control. Whether it's the government, or the police. Well the good news is that there is a good God in control. More than ever, we need to be sharing with our friends that we know a God who is in complete control of his creation. We need to come to Him to have life.

Jesus echoes this when he says, 'Do not worry about your life: what you will eat. Or about your body; what you will wear.' He says to look at the birds, and the flowers. Even though they don't work or store up food, God clothes them and feeds them. If he provides so well for them, how much more will he provide for us?

3. People are Made in the Image of God

The third thing we see in creation is that human beings are made in the image of God. Now this psalm doesn't mention it specifically, but it hints at in the way God looks after us:

Psalm 104:14-15 *He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate— bringing forth food from the earth: ¹⁵ wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts.*

God gives good gifts to his creatures, especially to humans. Not just food to survive, but special blessings to gladden our hearts. With all the brokenness in the world, and especially during a pandemic, it's easy to feel depressed. We can feel hopeless, like no one cares for us. But the Bible clearly teaches that we are precious to God. In the first book of the Bible, it says that we are unique among all other creatures:

Genesis 1:26 *Then 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."*

We are given special dignity and a purpose, to rule over all of creation, as God's representatives. Like children sharing in the family business, we are God's children, and he shares his rule over the world with us.

Many people misunderstand the message of the Bible. They think it's all about guilt. 'We're born evil'. 'There's nothing good in people'. 'Christianity just wants to make people feel guilty'. Well we did sin, but we can't forget that in the beginning, God made us very good. We were the most precious part of his creation. And he blesses people. Every good thing we enjoy is a gift from him. He had a great plan for us, to be his children. And he still does, through the Lord Jesus.

But if there's no God, then human beings are no different to the animals or the rocks. We're not special. People say, 'We're nothing but mammals'. But we don't live like that. When we say we're having Thai for dinner, we don't mean Thai people! Why is it ok to eat chicken but not human beings? If there is no Creator, then we are not created in the image of God. And murder is not wrong. It's just survival of the fittest.

But in fact, we are precious and special to God. He has made us to rule over creation, as his representatives. And that means we need to look after the world, not just use and abuse it. Now, we have failed in that task. The image of God in us is damaged, but it's still there. Even though we've failed, we are still precious to God.

And that's why he sent his precious only Son, Jesus. He is the *perfect* image of God: reflecting his glory, upholding the universe by his powerful word. And yet, he is the one who died for you and me, so we can be God's children again. He didn't die for animals or even angels. He was born a man, to restore us to the image of God.

4. We Were Created to Praise Him!

Many philosophers and psychologists have realised that human beings need purpose. We are different to the animals in that we ask, 'Why?' Even young children ask, 'Why should I do it this way?', 'Why am I here?' Human life can't flourish without purpose. It is what drives us, and grows us and gives us hope.

The Bible clearly teaches that we are created to glorify God. And if that's our purpose, then that is what will bring us most satisfaction, and joy!

And that's reflected in this psalm too. The psalmist doesn't just list God's works like a Wikipedia entry. The creation moves him to uncontainable praise and joy.

Again, Einstein shows that this is not just a religious feeling, but a longing within us to praise a higher power:

The scientists' religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.

People think that God's commands to praise him are self-centred and arrogant. Like God needs people to boost up his ego. But if you think about it, if God is the most glorious, beautiful, majestic being in the universe, then praising Him is the greatest experience we can ever be part of. Greater than getting to the top of Mount Everest and experiencing the jaw-dropping views. Would you keep an experience like that to yourself? No way, you'd tell everyone about it. Your social media would be full of it. To be able to see God's glory and praise Him is an amazing privilege, not a burden or a duty. And not to praise Him would be a lie, the greatest injustice. The greatest case of not giving credit where credit is due. The author, C.S. Lewis puts it well:

But the most obvious fact about praise—whether of God or anything—strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honour. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?" The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.

God, in creating us to praise Him, was not being self-centred, but was inviting us to enjoy Him, the most glorious, valuable and good being ever. When God tells us to praise him, it's not for his sake, but for ours! And that's how our psalm ends.

Psalm 104:33-34 *I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. ³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the Lord.*

You and I are not the centre of the universe. God is. He created and controls the universe with his sovereign power. And we find our dignity and purpose and joy in praising him. Without him, we become less than human. But with him, we are complete and human life flourishes. Now we know that life is not perfect, and we will look at why that is next week. But even now, you can come to your Creator and find life and purpose. I'm going to say a simple prayer, that you can echo in your own mind:

Dear God, I can see from what you have made, that you are an amazing Creator. Help me to see your glory, and your purpose for my life. Show me that you are real, so that I would come to you to have life, and live to praise you. For your glory, Amen.