

'In the Beginning God created...'

by Art Katz

The sermon explores the purpose of God in creation, the church's reflection of God's character, and the significance of creation in understanding God's loving and sharing nature.

Duration: 1:24:26

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Matthew 6:33, John 1:1, Romans 1:17, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2

Topics: "Beginning"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his experience of preaching the word of God to a colony of people who were not living for the purpose of God. He describes how the power of the word of God impacted the people, awakening something within them. Despite the inadequate technology and chaotic atmosphere, the speaker felt the weight of the responsibility to deliver the message effectively. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing God as the creator of the world and our dependence on Him, as seen in the story of Paul in Athens.

Transcript

Your beginnings are fraught with remarkable purpose, Lord, and we ask a grace that you would begin, my God, to open our heart and our understanding of what was in creation from the very first, that is, the statement of yourself, of what you are as God, and that we have not even begun, my God, to understand, to apprehend. We ask, Lord, that you would do something for the foundations of our own life, our own faith for the Church, as we go back to the beginnings, my God, and see there the things that are implicit for the end. Grant now, my God, your direction, the expression of your heart and wisdom and understanding and that measure that is appointed for us, and we thank you for the privilege of what is before us to go back to the beginning, to the origin of things, to creation itself.

Guide us by your precious eye. We thank and give you praise for this privileged time now in Jesus' name. Okay, well, just to read from Genesis 1-1, In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Probably wouldn't hurt to spend a few weeks on that verse. It's not the beginning of God, because God is without beginning. God is from eternity to eternity.

He is self-existent, but it's the beginning of God's act of creation, and that's what we want to focus on, the heaven and the earth. So this is the span of God's creative intention of these spheres, and both deserve uttermost respect. Somewhere in this Jewish commentary, let me see if I can find it, and elsewhere that

I've seen it, it says that we need to have our feet on the earth, but our head and hearts in heaven.

So we need to span the breadth of what is in God's creation, heaven and earth. In fact, we're called to be a heavenly people on the earth, and to bring the dimensions of heaven into the ordinary and the everyday and the earthly things. So I'm happy for God's heaven and earth, and that he might give us a deep appreciation for both.

Probably the one cannot be understood independent of the other. You can't consider heaven separate from the earth, and earth will suffer if it's considered separately and independently from heaven. Somehow these two domains of God need to be brought into his perspective.

So, all the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said, let there be light. There was light, and God saw the light, that it was good. God divided the light from the darkness, and God called the light day, and the darkness he called night, and the evening and the morning were the first day.

I'm not going to read beyond that, because that's part of your own assignment to familiarize yourself again with the scriptures, and the way in which it has pleased God to set down his creation, and to establish it day by day in the divine wisdom, but that it begins with light is something that should not be lost to us. Light is the beginning, and that there's a separation from darkness is God's first creative act, and somehow we have not only creation to consider, but covenant, and it's interesting in this Jewish commentary on the Torah that they recognized that there's a connection, that in the biblical view creation and history belong together. Creation is the foundation of a covenantal relationship between God and the world, and in a specific and important sense between God and Israel.

So God's intention, though Israel is not yet made mention, is already implicit according to these commentators in the acts of creation, and if we follow our Genesis, it's not long before we come to it. Man, and then the descendants of men, the judgment of God with the flood, Noah and his descendants, and out of that line comes Abraham, and God's redemptive strategy in reconciling a lost mankind to himself that has already taken place in the early chapters of Genesis. Creation and the fall, and then Abraham, and out of Abraham Israel, because God has got to have a demonstration of what he is and about in the earth and before all nations in the one nation that he has appointed and with whom he has made covenant.

We'll get into this again. There's got to be something set before the nations that is graphic, visible, and tangible, and Israel is appointed of all nations for that task, to set before the nations the demonstration of God and his way by his own conduct and his own practice. That Israel has failed in that is part of the continuing tragedy and misfortune of man's failure, but that God will ultimately bring that through, and which the church has significant part, is the whole Heil's Geschichte, the salvation history of God.

It's a cosmic sweep of God, a tremendous drama, and the church that is ignorant of it is condemned, as I so often say, to a mere succession of Sundays, to mere services. The thing that makes the church the church is its understanding of its place in this whole drama that has its inception in creation and its conclusion in revelation and the triumphal fulfillment of God's intention of what was with him at the first, in the beginning, God. I hear these commentators speak of the Bible as a Jewish book, that through Abraham and his descendants, the realization of God's plan for humanity will be hastened and, in fact, be made possible altogether.

So even the Jewish community needs to be aware, and probably has lost sense, that there's a purpose for itself beyond itself for the nations, and that it's not the self-contained chosenness of God for some enjoyment of the light of its own. It's there for a purpose for the nations, and maybe part of the church's function is to instruct Israel about its own meaning, because it has been lost to it in its lostness. But here, in this commentary, the reference is touched, that from the beginning, this whole genesis and the coming forth into Abraham has to do with God's plan for humanity, all nations, for the redemption of his creation.

Okay, I don't know where to turn. I've got so many possibilities before me. None of this would be open to our understanding merely from our observation of nature, that no amount of scientific explanation about how things have come to be or any observation of nature is itself an instruction, but that the word of God tells us how to understand creation.

In the beginning, God created. There's no argument. There's no defense of God.

It goes without saying. It's implied. God is God, and that creation is his work, and that the only way to understand it is to receive what he speaks about it and how he has performed it and to find his purpose in his word about it.

If we were left without a word, we would be left to speculation of every conflicting kind, but God has spoken and given us an understanding in his word that he's the author of creation and that we know that God, by definition, is a purposeful God, so that his purpose must be implied in what he has created, making man in his own image, giving man a platform for his activity and in the way in which God has been pleased to establish the heaven and the earth. Carl Barth, B-A-R-T-H, some commentators say he's a giant, a theological giant of the kind that should be equated with Luther, with Calvin, St. Augustine. There have been certain giants of the faith in the history of the faith to whom much grace has been given in breadth of understanding and in communicating to the church valuable insight.

Carl Barth is considered a 20th century giant, and though his fame is kind of dissipating today, I greatly esteem this man. So just to give you a little sample of his own insight in this volume of his work called The Doctrine of Creation. The world would not exist at all if God did not exist, and if it were not from him.

It is because it does not exist of itself, but only because God willed and created it. It has no power over its own self and its own form, that it does not belong to itself, and that it cannot control itself. God is not only the creator, he's the lord over his creation.

The creation is not something that is independent of him once it's established, but in a continual relationship with him who has made it for his purposes. We have got to proclaim the purpose of God in creation, because he didn't have to do it. And how long did he exist in his timeless existence as the self-existent one without creation? Why did he, in a moment of his own choosing, set it in motion? What's the significance of that timing, and what's the purpose for his having established it? We can look to some New Testament statements about that.

Somebody turn to Colossians, I think it's 1.16. Somebody turn to Romans 1.17, Hebrews chapter 1 verse 2, and Revelation chapter 4 speaks about creation. Let's hear those New Testament statements that might give us a sense of the purpose of God in his creation. Has someone turned to Colossians? I've got that one.

Okay. Colossians 1.16, for by him all things were created both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created by him and for him. Amen.

Let that sink into our hearing a bit. Created by him and for him. Who has Romans 4.17? As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations, in the sight of God in whom he believed.

He was appointed our father in the sight of God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and speaks of non-existent things as if they already existed. The point of that verse is the symmetry or the harmony between creation and resurrection.

You can almost sense as you read creation of God out of the darkness and out of the chaos bringing forth something is not unlike the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and that this reference that God who made those things to be which were not echoes again the genius of God in creation so that the resurrection is God again asserting himself as creator and if God is going to resurrect Israel who has failed in his purposes and has brought to death by its sin and its alienation from God again we're going to have a recreative act of God in the in the resurrection of Israel to fulfill God's intention in it from the first so every resurrection act is another assertion of God in his creative power and it's there's a reason why in seminaries they teach a course called creation and redemption

they bring together creation and redemption because redemption is nothing other than God acting in creative power to fulfill his intention from the first in things that have failed of that intention through the failure and sin of man Israel and the church and every time God will answer to man's failure he answers at the same power by which he had the first asserted in creation so we just need to be alive to the affinity between creation and resurrection Jesus commences a new creation by his own resurrection from the dead in his own ascension a new order of mankind so that God is recreating in the resurrection of Jesus in the way in which he asserted that same power at the first how about Hebrews chapter one is it verse two or one and two as in the last day spoken of both by the son coming

at the point of error of all things by whom he also made the worlds by also by whom he also made the worlds okay there's a there's another verse maybe someone knows it about all things were made by him and for him yeah is that John go ahead you want to read that Romans 11 36 for from him and through and to him are all things amen is it revelations four that speaks about all things were made for him for his delight for his pleasure somebody look at revelation four we sing that often thou art worthy oh lord to receive glory and honor and power for thou has created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created amen okay so we have a basic statement reiterated in scripture of the purpose for creation is for God's pleasure his delight his satisfaction his enjoyment his

glorification he didn't have to do it he chose to do it and kahlbot is very insistent in reminding us that God is under no constraint to do anything and that everything that he does is out of his own chosenness and out of his own freedom God cannot be imposed upon creation is his baby he chose to create I'm so grateful hallelujah that it was in his good pleasure that it is his pleasure because he wanted to make man in his image he wanted to have fellowship he didn't want to enjoy his own divinity unto himself although he he well could have but his nature of what he is in himself moved him to create and bring into existence those with whom he could fellowship and share his glory and dominion even over that creation can you get that in your spirit the magnitude of God to share is something

like the father has given to Jesus a name above every name that to him every knee shall bend and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the father what do you realize what you're doing father you're giving to this upstart the the kind of consideration and honor that belongs to you exclusively you're giving to him the name to which every knee shall bend and in to the glory of God the father you're delighted in that you didn't have to you could have kept it to yourself you didn't have to have a son and you don't have to have many sons with whom to share your glory but it's your nature to do so how can we talk about loving God if we have not understood if our hearts have not broken over what he is in himself that is displayed in creation in in a creation that need

not have been except that he chose to perform it and opened himself to an unnecessary anguish and pain and suffering in the failure of Adam and Eve in the failure of Cain in in the nations that were in rebellion against him in chapter 10 and 11 of Genesis God opened himself to suffering by bringing into being what he has in the hope of the greater glory that that he will enjoy I don't know how to say this I'm just I'm trying to feel my way into this myself and these theologians and Calbot especially wrestles with this that this act of creation is the constitutive act of his deity don't don't get panicky when you hear some highfalutin language he's not saying these things to be fancy and say look my no hands but a theologian more than us is extremely careful about the words that he employs

and they are always lean no more than is necessary to communicate the thought what is he saying here creation is God's constitutive act can you think of one thing that you have done that you would say you want to know who I am consider this one thing that I've done this one thing that I have done expresses me it's the genius of what I am about summed up in this one act that's what creation is for God it's his constitutive act it's what he is in himself is expressed in the phenomenon or the act of creation creation is God acting out of himself for his own purpose by which he reveals what he is in himself benevolent loving desiring fellowship wanting to share his glory not willing to be contained in himself as exclusive unto himself nor for himself well what's the implication of the

revelation of God in creation if that's true of him for us who are his church which he has created that we should not also exhibit that reality and that mentality and that spirit in ourselves are we for ourselves that church that is only a self-perpetuating entity and whose programs are only designed for its own continuation contradict the genius and the character of what God is in himself as revealed in creation he chose not to be alone he chose to be for others he chose to share he's not a self-perpetuating God for himself and the church that loses that that character or that never had it how then is it the testimony or the witness of the God who in the beginning created do we appreciate our own creation and what is the purpose for ourselves as church that ought to be the reflection of

what was his purpose in having created creation to begin with see the implications of this this is theological reflection and the beauty of it is that it's not reserved for theologians alone God intends for the church to be theological because theos is God and theological is thought rumination consideration of God that's why in the German universities unlike America seminaries were not a separate institution they were part of the university but theology was called the queen of the sciences it was the the the crown of all learning if you took science or philosophy or history it was only as a foundation to bring you into the deeper consideration of the study of God that contains all of that because there's no history without a world there's no history without a mankind that God has created

so the Germans rightly understood that theology is the queen of all consideration and it needs to be our understanding also can you imagine a church that's bored a church that's predictable a church that's

listless that has to find some novelty to entertain its congregants when it has the breadth of all this given by God for its consideration and to grow thereby so creation denotes the divine action in the eternal beginning of the son by the father because it's through the son that creation is made he is the creator and therefore only in the inner life of God himself the secret of creation is out of God's own reality God will then brought into being that which corresponds to himself as the constitutive act of his deity you want to know what God is you've got to go back to the beginning in

the beginning God created so this creation also indicates a relationship between God and the world and one in which God enjoys an absolute superiority and a lordship on the one hand and the dependence of creation on the other maybe sometime in the course of these days we'll look at act 17 when Paul steeped in Hebrew understanding is brought by God to Athens which is the classic capital of the pagan world and the glory that was Greece of humanism of philosophy and he sets before them in one statement the purpose of God is God has made of one blood all nations of men and established their bounds and their habitations that they might seek after him says God who created the heavens and the earth is Lord over all in the first and one statement from Paul he sets forth a foundational view of

reality that has its heart in the fact that God created the heavens and the earth and the nations of all them that dwell therein that you Athenians have not got a playground for yourself to do your thing independent of him who created it and has a purpose in it that you're Greek and not French and that you're in this part of the Mediterranean world is not happenstance nor accident but part of the divine wisdom and strategy in creation because the God who made the heavens and the earth is the Lord over all including Athens and including you and if you don't reckon on that and continue in your independent and highfalutin self-celebrating way enjoying your own culture your own civilization the day will come when Greeks will be known for greasy spoon diners and that's all they'll be known for

there'll be a second rate third rate backwater of the world and the glory that was Greece will be reduced to a scandal and shame of a nation that's reduced to nothingness fighting over Cyprus with the Turks thank you lord for that statement because they did not heed the apostolic word that came to them at their principal place at Mars Hill where they come every day to hear some new thing they heard the word of God and the definitive statement of God about God and refused to take it into consideration and lost what measure they had and became a shambles and a contradiction to what was once the supreme glory of civilization and that is that the God who creates is also the God who's Lord you know why because when you create something you own it it's yours and you're Lord over it to do with

it what you will for you have created it for your purpose alone it behooves us who have life by virtue of that creation to understand something of what those purposes are for what shall it mean for us to live in ignorance of them if he's Lord over his creation and we have the privilege of life because of it what is our purpose in that creation and how shall we go about making our decisions and calling our shots and living our lives in a reckless indifference to the underlying and great purposes of God and having established the creation and I would say that the great tragedy that permeates the earth and Russia as we spoke in the prayer time has come out of a willful ignorance and a rejection are not wanting to know what the purpose of God is lest we find ourselves in conflict with it or

having to surrender our petty purposes in an acknowledgement of his greater purpose.

Purpose is a key and no little wonder that my first message on this recent trip to Canada at a Hutterite colony the first time a door in over 25 years has opened to me to address an entire colony unprecedented

that it would be given to any man outside their own ranks I had no message I was in the darkness of the deep I was without form I was in chaos oh you you never saw a more pathetic spectacle than what I was on that night when we left the one colony to go to the other and I saw that the women were going to join us I said do you have to come can't you stay home what do you want to do come and watch my my humiliation I have nothing I have no inspiration I'm a dead dog my tail is between my legs I have no desire I'm going like a snail with the God it could be cancelled it was a darkness

over the deep it was a chaos of a mishmash of of of turbulence that could not even be interpreted and I came into that and we arrived at that colony and we sat down with the spiritual leader and some of his sons and men in the living room and they were making chit chat and I'm I'm dying multiple deaths five minutes away from the time of speaking and they're making chit chat what did they think that a professional had arrived and had brought with him in his briefcase the the message and he's going to perform it don't they know that every word of God is creative that it's going to set something in motion for ill or for good judgment or blessing and who is sufficient for these things don't they know and that the speaker himself doesn't know yet what that word is five minutes away from the

speaking and at once and for all opportunity never before given that if it is muffed and missed that'll shut the door permanently to any further penetration into those communities who have a potential for salvation of Jews in the last days do you understand what was at stake so why was I in that condition why did I come uh full of vim and vinegar and ready to go and got it all boy let me at him just the opposite I was a picture of death in terrible darkness without light and without seeing and without knowing I'm listening to these men with their chit chat which compounds my suffering the which I say that the the tedium the the the inanity of more small talk in in the face of my turbulence was an unbelievable combination you want to be a bearer of the word these are the sufferings through

which you'll go not once but frequently and all the more when something of great moment is at stake and so I said don't you guys ever pray you know we're going into a meeting of an unprecedented kind don't you ever pray they hadn't thought about it and only one young man probably the only one born again in the room beside myself uh deigned to pray and then I said to this brother the leader I said do you have a place where I can just have a few moments alone with the lord and shut me in his office and I went down on my knees should have gone down to my friends I look at the pathetic condition that I'm in moments away from a life and death situation and I had not a word what's the word and the word was purpose that's the one word purpose and I came before that congregation oh I wish I could

describe it it would have taken the wind out of your sails the children were in the front how can they how can they hear a man like me and behind them their parents with their arms are looking with that kind of look like my first words were to them were like I feel like I've come from another planet I mean there's just no correspondence between us there's no way that you can conceivably understand anything that I could say we're just from remote you know ends of the earth that's the way I was impacted by looking at faces that's why God says don't look at their faces and then I opened my mouth in that terrible death and began to speak a purpose and the lord quickened the remembrance of a line from that American philosopher poet Thoreau I think it's David Thoreau who wrote a book called

Walden Pond in about the 1850s something like that in which he said all men live lives of quiet desperation and my message to them was God combining the word purpose and the remembrance of Thoreau that except you have consciously and willfully sought the lord to understand his purposes and have taken them to your own heart to live them out your life is a life of quiet desperation no matter how

much occupied you are with your hard right tasks and they are a very industrious productive people in the midst of all of that if you're not consciously living for the purpose of God your life is a life of quiet desperation and that was the word of life and I watched their faces visibly change as that word continued to go forth as like God hammering on the dead doors of their life and awakening

something and when I finished they sang a couple of courses the last course was just as you are you know come I just I said to this brother Jake I said should I give an invitation I had sat down he said no he said no one will respond what he was saying was we don't give invitations it's never been done I said okay I continued to wait I said well shall I just go and conclude the service in prayer yeah so I went back to the microphone and what a microphone I think was more like a washboard I never heard sound more choked and stultifying than out of that inadequate piece of technology dammering lips oh I don't know how anybody could hear through it and so I just concluded with prayer and I said if anyone has any need for prayer or any thought that wants to come up we're available as a

service closes close the service and a sea of people came up John John Mandel who was videotaping the service he said I could kick myself for having put my camera away and missed that sight of these people all around you as you sat in the chair and they were on their knees on the floor looking up at you waiting for a word waiting for prayer waiting something had broken life had come so a creative word out of death now I'm hearing from these Hutterites who have heard of that that I'm being called a false prophet for having given an invitation that it's a no-no that you don't know so you can believe that if anything is born of God it's going to receive a counteraction against it this is not just a once and for all everything that has to do with creation initially must in some measure

accompany every creative act of God and I just gave you an example of one if you had the patience there were two other occasions in those days exactly like that in the 10-12 days in Canada where something was birthed out of the same kind of death the sense of futility despair hopelessness and darkness where on another occasion in North Bay Canada at a charismatic meeting where the messianics had been invited I looked out on this droll site d-r-o-l-l totally dispiriting listening to the so-called worship from the platform that was so blah and the and the the pastor who was leading in it a man who gave such evidence of defeat and failed life that the whole thing was a statement of the ever all that is lamentable in present day christendom and charismatic christianity and I and I'm looking

at these faces in their condition they all look like high school dropouts I'm a high school dropout myself well what I'm saying is they look like people who are dull incapable of being reached and somehow satisfied with this blah kind of thing that was going on and how am I going to address that and my first words were I said I can't recall another occasion where I had been in provoked to jewish snobbery as I am tonight because I've been looking down my jewish nose at your reprehensible gentile dullness and before I could get that statement out of my mouth the lord took over he took over out of that I was I was expressing my despair of any hope of communication and that the best thing that the only thing you've done for me is awakened me to being a jewish snob and before I could get that

statement out the lord and you I wish with the god you could have been there I had a freedom I was moving I don't know that my feet were on the ground I was from one side of the room and I watched the faces they were awakening from their death when I finished I could not believe it was the same congregation to which I had begun something had taken place of a creative kind that made all things new and had brought them into the purposes of god because north bay is at a lake and river system that if you follow it long enough it'll bring you into the great lakes from the most northern most locations of canada

through north bay in smallest craft all the way into the great lakes and to Duluth 150 miles from us and to us and from us god knows where god will be bringing jews one day because a

word came forth in north bay canada to an unsuspecting audience that had no sense of god's purpose in the mystery of israel to embrace it in one hearing by the creative word of god that had come into their death through death so it behooves us to understand the anatomy of creation if god had to bring forth out of darkness and out of chaos by the operation of the spirit to begin with what shall it be at any occasion when god is again creative and what is the work of god if it is not that and what are we performing if we're just bringing messages or predictable things that is not the creative work of god in the given moment according to his wisdom which includes that's why if there was any way that i could have been kept from this table i would have grasped at it i came like the proverbial

snail i don't want to begin either how do you begin to consider the awesome dimensions of creation of all of the books what i turn lord so there's always some resonance of a darkness over the deep especially if it's got to do with the deep let's let's look at that the statement there really verse two did you hear what he just said no especially how did he just say it has to do with the deep yeah i mean that was yeah if it has not to do with the deep we ought not to have anything to do with it he's not called us to surface phenomena or triviality and to that i turn to gear heart on lab and his commentary on genesis great old testament scholar statement is that god is the lord of the world but not only in the sense that he subjected a pre-existing chaos to his ordering will so he sees

creation as coming out of some pre-existing chaos and this is a contradiction and a paradox but paradoxes are not uncommon in the scripture and in the faith because we know that god created *ex nihilo* which in latin means out of nothing in other words god has no dependency he does not require raw material he himself creates from nothing the whole thing that to be lord over all and that he's not he owes nothing to anything that precedes him to draw from it in order to create and yet the scripture in a strange way indicates that there was something there at the time of creation that he had to separate in order to bring forth the world and it's a mystery and men need to probe it as we're seeking to do even now the earth is without form and void and darkness was upon the face

of the deep you can look in your version with me from 45 verse 7 i form the light and create darkness i make peace national well-being moral evil proceeds from the will of men but physical evil proceeds from the will of god and i create physical evil calamity i am the lord who does all these things verse 8 let fall in showers you heavens from above and let the skies rain down righteousness the pure spiritual heavenly life possibilities that have their foundation in the holy being of god let the earth open and let let them skies and earth sprout forth salvation let the righteousness germinate and spring up as plants do together i the lord have created it woe to him who strives with his maker i don't know if you've noticed how frequently in the psalms and especially in isaiah god reminds

israel that he is the creator and the maker of israel itself he's created another creation he's created israel and somehow it's critical for israel's understanding of god to reckon on god as being the creator it says in verse 15 here's here's the israel statement truly you are a god who hides yourself hides yourself oh god of israel the savior verse 17 but israel shall be saved by the lord with an everlasting salvation you shall not put to shame or confound to all eternity for thus says the lord who created the heavens and god himself who formed the earth and made it who established it and created it not a worthless waste he formed it to be inhabited i am the lord and there was no one else so there's a remarkable conjunction god reasserting himself as creator and also israel's deliverer

israel's savior because it's going to take god in its creative power to establish that restoration here's a little footnote to that statement about the reiteration of god as creator in the scriptures pertaining to israel in this jewish commentary on genesis isaiah describes god's creation of israel in the same terms that genesis uses in describing the creation of the world that there's going to be any hope for israel that they can believe that out of their desolation and destruction will come a fulfillment it will be because they recognize the power of god who created the earth in the beginning is also the god who's going to recreate them the same terms that genesis uses in describing creation of the world isaiah uses in describing the recreation of israel okay i just wanted to finish up

on this german theologian wrestling over the issue of this chaos so this verse speaks not only of a reality that once existed in a primeval period but also of a possibility that always exists an interesting statement that this isn't just a quaint note of what was in the primeval past but somehow a pattern that always exists there is always a darkness and a chaos out of which creation comes man has always suspected that behind all creation lies the abyss of formlessness that all creation is always ready to sink into the abyss of the formless that the chaos therefore signifies simply the threat to everything created this suspicion has been a constant temptation for faith faith and creation must stand this test there's almost a chaos here one two three four five books and i got two more and

it's something like throwing the clay on the wheel you know the way a potter begins it's an oozy mess it's a mass of of unclaimed material it's a chaos but unless it goes onto the wheel in that form you cannot have the finished object you've got to stick your hands into the ooze you've got to go into the chaos you've got to have a creative faith that believes that with the wheel spinning and the the use of your fingers something will come out of it that will be transformed and transcendent from the ugly mess that is now on that wheel and maybe that's a picture of the church with the raw material that god gives saints in their broken condition their failed marriages their carnality their immaturity there it is you didn't put an ad in the paper to get the best recruits from ben israel you

got what god sent in whatever condition they're in and it's on the wheel and you have to stick your hands into that ooze every day i have a tape on my visit to the royal porcelain factory in worcester england i forgot what it's called me where do i come off to china i'm a brooklyn boy i'm the bull in the china shop but the lord had me to visit the royal porcelain factory in worcester where its kilns have never subsided in 300 years including world war ii they continue to keep their heat and i took the connoisseurs tour and when i saw what went into the making of fine china it was more of an education than any seminary could ever have provided including the preparation of the clay itself and the bone that is put into the clay to make bone china and the ooze and how it's purified and

squeezed and forms into mold and that every application of color requires another time through the intense furno that the kiln is under extreme heat and the gold those gold rim plates do not come up until they are burnished with grit and there are women who do nothing but rub the gold rim that looks like the most ugly earthly it looks i hate to tell you what color brown it looks like and here are these women with their shammy cloths working with a grit a pumice continuing to rub and rub and rub and sure enough lo and behold that ugly brown thing becomes kind of yellowish and as they continue to rub lo and behold it becomes golden and finally it's just a brilliant thing and that brilliant gold trim endures for the life of the plate itself one of the last things that the guy did i'll never

forget it he held up two plates they looked identical they both seemed to have gold rims and and they were they seemed to be the real thing and he took his finger and he plunked the one plate and it went thud and

he plunked the other plate the real thing that had gone through the furnace many times and it went that reverberation went up to heaven it must be reverberating still so how far will god go and with what will he begin in the beginning in things that are waste and chaotic in order to bring forth by his creative power that thing that will be eternally enduring and a tribute to his eternal praise and glory including israel itself and including the church for if the church does not attain to it israel will not it's only through the church's coming of age and coming into the form of

god's creative intent that israel will have any hope at all because by the time god has reduced israel she will be formless and without without form and a chaos and a darkness and a waste and out of that god will bring eternal glory because that's the way it is in the so faith and creation must stand this test which is to say the way is to put your hands in and not flee from it and that's why covenant is so important because if we were not bound by covenant we would flee because in the face of the hopelessness of that waste and that chaos where there's nothing human that would encourage us to go on we know that covenant binds us to that waste and we can't run from it and the god who established the covenant is with us in it and he will see to it in time if we're faithful to covenant that

he'll bring that waste into a gorgeous form not just the restoration of the marriage that it could be where it once was but into some new and creative dimension that had never attained and would never have attained except that we first allowed it to be reduced to formlessness and chaos and yet believed and did not flee from it because we're bound and joined to it by Jesus was reduced to a chaos and the reason we have not recognized that is because romantic artists have spiritualized away the remarkable suffering that he bore and that's why I commend this this holy ghost masterpiece in Colmar France that is called the Eisenheim altar by an artist whose name begins with G Grunewald that shows Jesus on the cross where you have to rub your eyes and say is that a man or is that an animal you

never saw a more distorted grotesque of a man than the crucified Christ in that painting it's a holy ghost genius it shows a gnarled form his jaw is open in depth his lips are white the saliva is dried up his face is flecked with blood his body is full of the impediment from the whippings his feet are gnarled you never saw an ugly he was without beauty that any man should desire him he was without form he was reduced to a chaos isn't that exactly the point that out of that chaos the God who was in the beginning brought forth this resplendent son who will be the eternal praise to his glory the scripture in revelation speaks of the lamb slain from the foundations of the world what does that imply that even with creation God knew that such a sacrifice would be required and that it was

implicit in his creation from the beginning that in fact the one who was to be slain was himself the creation and the creator the world was made by him and there was nothing made that was not made by him so that Jesus himself and being creator and setting in motion what would be a tragic failure and would require his death knew it from the beginning he was willing for the suffering of his own formlessness and being made a grotesque and a waste and a desolation from creation itself now what does that say about God that he knew that with creation it was not going to be a picnic that this wasn't a little casual enjoyment of an artist taking a dab at something but something would be required in this creation by the very necessity of it that would make his suffering implicit from its

foundation so we'll come back to this again but what a revelation of God that creation is not some kind of top of his head thought of the moment it's the deepest statement it is the constitutive act of God and that act of creation God sets himself forth in a way that would not have been our opportunity to know him if he had not done it but to know him as he is in what is implicit in this creation from the beginning even his

willingness to stick his hands into the ooze of the darkness and the waste and the chaos in order to separate and to bring forth it's a wonderful statement what it's nothing less than in fact what he does at the cross it's the same thing again reiterated it's a God who's willing to suffer who need not have done it but chose freely out of his own sovereignty to perform

it because that's what he is as God and if that's what he is as God in the willingness to embrace that suffering and that anguish that continues for him still as he listens to the blasphemous rejection of himself that goes forth from all over the face of the earth today from what he has created in his image and watches that image being perverted and destroyed through homosexuality through drugs men being made bestial worse than animals yet he bears it and he knew it from the first because he wanted fellowship with man because he wanted to share his glory because he's a God who gives of himself he's the eternal sacrifice always pouring out and he thinks a bride well we follow the Lord and Israel itself will have its road to Calvary so if all this is true can you think of the significance

of the advent of evolution through Darwin what that meant when that struck the civilized Christian world at the end of the 19th century in the commencement of the 20th the brilliant concept of evolution and science as an explanation for the world and for creation as being accidental as having evolutionary forms and that all life that we know it had its origin in this and came successively through a process of selection is the most tantalizing beguiling tempting of give me a word it's an affront and a seduction for the human mind to think in terms like that that completely in every point in particular repudiate the explanation of creation given in scripture about God as God so to lose that scriptural understanding given in the word even unconsciously to be affected by the evolutionary

temper of modern thought is to lose to that degree the uniqueness of God the awesomeness of God the holiness of God the character of God the fear of God the love of God and that's exactly what is the truth of the condition of the church today it has been affected more than it knows because it has not contended for the faith it has not recognized what a demonic assault that theory of evolution has been in its power and it permeates its own household its children they're going to the public schools they're getting it it's in it's in the air it cannot help but depreciate the sense of God that would have been ours had we exclusively clung to the word of God that explains to us in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth so we need to fight our way back to a pristine and original

comprehension of that creation as being the statement of God or we will find ourselves losing the sense of God that comes to us as created from the first and if I had the ability and the skill and the knowledge to show you the connection between evolution and racism that if there are higher forms and that the weaker forms have subsided that there's such a thing then as a master race as an Aryan race is the pinnacle of the evolutionary process and the thing that is competing with it and opposing it are these defunct racial groups like gypsies and Jews who have too great an inroad into German civilization and manhood and seek to corrupt it and so the only answer for them is extermination that the superior evolutionary form of man might be triumphant and have a thousand-year rule and

reign under the right the kingdom of death so Hitler's racism is rooted in evolution and so when we talk about death it's more than we can understand at a glance eating from the wrong tree we're going to get into that that's going to be something for us because more of us are eating from that tree than we know so we see here the thought not so much between the poles of nothingness and creation as between the poles of chaos and cosmos can you follow a statement like that here's this German theologian saying that as we're looking at this text and what a theologian borrows into the text it's not the way we read it we go on

we've read our chapter for the day he's wrestling with this where does this stuff come from how could it be pre-existent creation of God alone is the creator why did God's

creation have to come out of that so he says that what we see is not so much the choice between nothingness and creation that there was nothing before God created but more the scriptures indicate that it's really the issue of chaos and cosmos cosmos is the ordered universe chaos is formlessness and destruction that's the those are the two poles and the two options God for the one the devil for the other so that in very creation God is coming in and asserting what he is in bringing an order by separating out from chaos light earth the stars the firmaments and then man it's it's God and we're on thin ground here we're just being very tentative speculative not enough has given us only a clue that it hints that there might have been some attempt of the evil one this fallen and presumptuous

angel what is whose beauty beguiled him and deceived him that he had some measure of power to attempt to mock God by imitating God and taking a stab out of himself but what did he produce if that's true but those that reflected his nature that is to say cruel violent invested with great power size the kinds of values that are contrary to God who chooses that which is weak lowly and humble God shows himself in his choices and the devil in his and now God comes in the beginning is not God God was forever but in the beginning of creation he enters something that evidently already was in some kind of a state that perhaps God judged and reduced it to the chaos and may and the existence of these prehistoric mammals their bones that that whole archaeology is that the word paleontology is the

actual examination of the bones has supported a view that well how could how could creation have been this recent when we have evidences of some forms of life that go back into primeval time well the answer might be that that is a pre-creation a primeval existence which God brought into judgment and reduced to waste and then out of it brought forth the creation that we now occupy is one way to see it but I don't see God rushing to make an explanation he's allowing men to have enough rope to hang themselves you know they're seeking to find their own explanations from the tree of knowledge rather than from the word so let me get to this the actual concern of this entire report of creation is to give prominence form in order to the creation out of chaos which is the fundamental idea of

separating he separated darkness light from the darkness and that's something to dwell upon also he separated Abraham out of all the coldness we are a separated people get you out and be separate touch not the unclean thing there's a principle of separation in the work of God from creation that continues even through this time not only we are separated people but we need to be separated from our own carnality our own the chaos of our own thought if we're living too much from knowledge so there's a process of separation that is at its heart with creation itself I just gave a little terse reply to something that was on my computer some unsolicited email statement from a prophetess in the Caribbean Jamaica a long windy statement thus sayeth the Lord when God said what God is saying to the

prophet all underlined in bold letters so I wrote back a little answer I said I'm sorry but I'm not persuaded that this is God speaking mainly because it is so verbose there's too much word here and God doesn't need to underline what I know of God from his word look at this in the beginning God created that's all he says he gives us the most threadbare spare he's very lean when I see these voluble statements I said I'm not persuaded that that's a prophetic statement it seems more like your own flesh being ventilated and that if it is God he only needs a few words to say what he has to say and we'll know I said in my speaking there's no sin so here's an inability of someone thinking themselves prophetic addressing prophets who has not learned to separate maybe a true gift from their own

carnality or their own necessity to be heard to be seen and to make a splash you mean an unwillingness to be hidden to be in the place of darkness and to be without form until it pleases God to bring forth the true thing one of the greatest reproaches that we had to face in the first years of this community is what are you doing what are you producing you know we couldn't answer we were a mess there was nothing coming out of us we were a formless mess waiting for the for God to but we were being provoked we should be doing something and performing something didn't we so there's an impatience in the church and an unwilling to suffer a process of being separated which I suppose is always painful and to be separated from ourselves which is maybe a final separation that the truth of what God

has formed can come forth like Moses in the cloud good yeah the whole process of Moses separate from Egypt separated from being a prince separated in a tending sheep for how many years separated at the burning bush separated at Sinai the whole process of God's continuing perfecting of a saint so the idea of creation by the word preserves first of all the most radical essential distinction between creator and creature creation cannot be even remotely considered an emanation from God it is not somehow an overflow or reflection of his being you know what he's saying here creation is not some kind of God coming out of the pores that you know this is an emanation of God no it's a conscious chosen act that commences with his word he spoke and said let there be the spirit of God brooded over the

deep he saw it he felt the agony the anguish the judgment of it and he spoke to it and commanded and separated from it by his word it's not an accidental creation it's not an overflow it's not something that it is it is rooted in the creative word of God and that's how we know of it because he has given us the word that we should not speculate and go to the tree of knowledge and try to understand how all this came about God said let there be so it is a product of his personal will and the only continuity between God and his work is his word in the beginning God spoke and said let there be separate the light from the darkness let there be firmament let there be day and night let there be stars let there be vegetation let there be animals everything is spoken so this is the distinct

quintessential act of God from creation is his word I don't like we need a moment's respectful silence to be brought back in a pristine way to the respect for the word because it was the word in the beginning that separated from the chaos when God spoke and said let there be and whenever God will separate whenever he will bring out of chaos whenever he will perform his creative act whether it's with the Hutterites at that colony or North Bay or here or anywhere through you or through me it will be through his word and that's why I was jealous to answer those people who think themselves prophetic to say aren't you saying too much isn't it too much your word God doesn't require all that valuable statement that needs to be underlined you who think that you're you're protecting the dignity of

the prophetic office by your prophetic statement are in fact actually degrading it because the prophetic office is the jealousy for the proclamation of the word of God that is God's word and not man's you by your profuse defense elaboration are actually demeaning both the prophetic office and and making it less than what it should be by too many words in a word you have not the sufficient respect for the word and when God is speaking it does not take many to establish a creative act in the beginning was the word it says in John and the word was with God and the word is God it's the word that is God God's act as creator and so not only must we come back to an awe and a respect and love and fear and admiration for what God has revealed in himself as a creator who has chosen freely to set

the world into being and to give man to populate it but that he has done so by his word and once we will have that respect for the word we ourselves will do less speaking and when we will speak it will be far

more significant I keep telling people don't talk to me don't engage me in conversation when you pick me up at the airport and I'm being taken to the meeting I don't want to be involved in babble yes a lot of interesting things I can say what do you think about this I'm trying to keep my mouth shut and not lose the integrity and the density of the word by too much uh volubleness I respect the word it's chaste it's lean and I have already learned that if you allow your mouth to give off even good things before the time when the real time comes for the creative word it will be diffused

and weakened so we need to be guardians for the word we need to respect the word and we need to sustain in our prayer those who are called to be the bearers of the word and among those even beyond those who teach is the prophetic word which is invariably and always an event more than an instruction so we need to guard those men and guard their utterance and guard their life and guard their integrity because they are the object of the fiercest opposition of the powers of darkness who have removed them and in removing them remove the creative word of the event that the world so desperately needs in the beginning was the word the beginning God through the word by the spirit over the deep that's the way it was in the beginning that's the way it will be at the end that's the way it must always

be here's a remarkable poetic statement maybe just to conclude now where he talks about darkness and the night that God has allowed the night he called it night and day he separated the light from the darkness he called it day he called it night and he allows night he allows darkness and you wonder why beside the fact that it shuts out things and gives us the opportunity for sleep and for rest night consists of nothing more than that the darkness of chaos which was eliminated eliminated now limited to be sure by order but that every night when the created world of forms flows together in formlessness chaos regains a certain power over what has been created how many of us have had night struggles there were strange dreams that haunt us that can't be interpreted most of my struggles are at

night in the realm of spirit that somehow the Lord has allowed a residue of something at night and in darkness maybe all the more that when light breaks forth in the dawn we will be the greater appreciators of it that there's a tension between darkness and light that night and day that has to remain in the wisdom and the providence of God he's not calling us to easy coasting and it's all made here this is all done no there's a continuing struggle creation is not yet completed there are things set in motion that wait for the final provision that comes from the church itself that can struggle through the night hours and anticipate the day and that whose works will be done in light and by the way that's just as a piece of practical instruction that i'm surprised to find that most believers

don't understand that practice is my own practice before going to bed as tired as i am always to pray lord i submit myself under your blood through the night hours that's my morning prayer to put myself under his blood from the commencement of the day but also at the ending of the day knowing that at night the powers of darkness are in the element and i don't want to be ravaged by them that i'm under your blood and don't allow anything to come in to my night hours except through your oversight your sovereignty and no dreams and no harassments that the enemy would have a free field day in my unconscious sleep state to workers mischief but only that measure of things that serve your redemptive purpose you want to haunt me you want to stir something to consciousness you're allowing those

things to be touched in symbolic dreams but nothing more so if you haven't if you've not adopted that practice i highly commend it particularly as fathers and husbands as priests in the home we invoke the blood over our children over our wives over our whole household that they would be protected through the night hours from the ravages of him who is the prince of darkness and if we're in a place of the kind of

responsibility that is mine in a fellowship i pray that for the entire fellowship that the blood be on every door in every household every head through the night hours and then in the morning so invoke the blood night somehow darkness is yet an opportunity for the enemy to do his work so to seek his mischief and we don't want to give him any more opportunity and the lord himself

will allow who has created isn't that what we read i have created the darkness i make the light that create darkness i create evil calamity i'm the lord who does all these things so woe to him who strives with his maker and even to contend and to say you've made a mistake you shouldn't have allowed night we should have been in the light all the time we don't have to suffer these things you should have not made an essential condition for creation the requirement to brood over a chaos and over a darkness let's not contend with our maker because what he has revealed in the beginning is his paradigm and his pattern right through to its fulfillment especially for and through the church so the word i want to end on that note god's distinct act it's his quintessential that means it's the essence

of the essence of god when he acts he acts through his word his word is actuality itself the genius of god and therefore he has made us in his image that we can form and speak words wow talk about creative possibility both for ill and for good for destruction or for blessing and yesterday at the end of our service having spoken the word we then prayed for family who had a crossroad and conferred blessing through a prayer of the word so we are guardians we are entrusted we're called we're co-creators with god is the privilege that no other expression of this creation has to speak words for us to squander words to speak lightly to speak mindlessly to speak foolishly to speak stupidly to speak sinfully is a an assault an affront against god we need to cherish that he has in his grand

generosity given us the privilege like himself to form and to speak words and if his speaking is his quintessential act the designation and the signature of his being what what our speaking to be our words are what we are what we say is what we are so for us to engage in cheap talk in frivolous nonsense in trivia in gossip worse yet we're misusing and abusing a wonderful creative gift that god intends to be life-giving he's made us in his image so we need to cherish the word so shall we bless the lord shall we speak good words to the lord our prayers are words who is sufficient for these things what to pray and how many how many believers have i confused who love israel and have been praying for the elimination of arafat and the plo and that this would be removed that would be removed

they would be assailing and i'm saying you might find yourself praying in opposition to god's own will that he's the creator of devastation well how should we pray the art we only knew how to pray what we thought was good for knowledge where you're going to have to pray creatively by the spirit for only the spirit of god knows the mind of the lord that's another kind of prayer and much more demanding than our easy verbal praying for the peace of jerusalem we're speaking words hallelujah i'm speaking them now now you know why i come as a snail to the table who who who does more speaking and in the multitude of much speaking is sin and my prayer often before the lord is forgive me that inadvertent transgression the iniquity of priesthood the iniquity of ministry that inadvertently will

always surface always come up in one form or another in the volume of many words forgive me love i'm guilty even when i don't know it there's a tension in the paradox even in my calling that as i'm called to be a spokesman and a bearer of your word yet i know that in the very operation something almost inadvertently finds expression that is not you forgive me that block that out from the memory the consciousness of those who purify the stream let's pray thank you lord for this day of beginnings hey in the beginning god here right over the subject what a beginning lord i can't order it i don't know how to begin i

just brought my chaos and confusion in five six and seven books not where to turn or how trusting that the god who brooded over the confusion and chaos at the beginning will brood

over us with the same loving propensity by your spirit and speak and guide us and give us your words and your understanding and lord we believe that you have oh we're grateful this morning was creative lord and we thank you for that it was life-giving it will have consequence for the future we will be far more patient when we have to face situations in our life that are chaotic and from which we desire to flee and will not hold steady trusting the covenant god to bring it through into a new form out of its formlessness so we bless you lord bless the church give it patience give it heart give it hope that you made to be in your image to finish my god would you have begun by the same power and through the exercise of the word by the spirit with which it began we thank you for the

preciousness of the faith the preciousness of our god the greatness of our god revealed from the first in his quintessential act in what was constitutive of his deity in creating the heavens and the earth and all that in them is we bow before you lord we humble we prostrate ourselves yes we're sitting but our spirits are before you lord we're stretched out on our faces my god we have said too much we've spoken too often we have been too light too critical we have not guarded our mouths the precious sacred privilege you've given us to form words we've not sufficiently recognized you my god forgive us lord we just come down before you we're silent before the holy one of israel who chose out of his free will in the beginning to create not only the earth but heaven thank you lord all we're

grateful that we have such a god as you are bless your name first

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