

# He Commanded and They Were Created

by John Piper

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and our total dependence on Him for everything.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1, Psalm 24:1, Psalm 104:29, Psalm 148:5, Isaiah 46:10, Matthew 11:28, Romans 9:20, Romans 11:36, Romans 15:4, 2 Corinthians 1:20, Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:3

**Topics:** "Creation Theology", "Redemptive History"

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## Description

John Piper preaches on the series of messages that will take the congregation from the creation of the world through God's dealings with Israel to the incarnation of God's Son, emphasizing the importance of knowing the God of creation and redemptive history for the advancement and joy of faith. He highlights that authentic love, adoration, and fear of God come in response to glimpses of God's actions and plans, not just by command. Piper stresses the significance of understanding God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, emphasizing that every moment of our existence is owed to God's word of command.

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## Transcript

October 4, 1981

Psalm 148:5

HE COMMANDED AND THEY WERE CREATED We begin today a series of ten messages which, God willing, will carry us from the creation of the world through the history of God's dealings with Israel to the incarnation of God's Son. Today we look at God the Creator, next Sunday the emergence of sin and misery; then God's covenant with Abraham, then exodus of Israel from Egypt, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, the wilderness wandering, the conquest of Canaan, the origin of the Davidic Kingdom, the prophetic message of a coming Messiah redeemer and finally the appearance of Jesus Christ in whom all the promises of God are yes and through whom we say Amen--so be it--to God for his glory (2 Cor. 1:20).

I believe the Lord has led me to this plan for our worship this fall because knowing the God of creation and redemptive history is a great means to the advancement and joy of our faith. It's no secret that my heart's desire for you and me is that we love God more deeply and adore him more fully and fear him with a greater sense of awe. But I have learned from the Bible and from experience that authentic love, adoration and fear cannot be manufactured in the heart simply because some preacher says they should be there. They happen in the heart in response to some glimpse of God in what he has done and plans to do.

Therefore my calling is not to stand here and say, "Love God! Adore God! Fear God!" My calling is to open the inspired album of God's history and say, "Look! Look at the cosmos coming into being out of nothing; look at the whole creation subjected to futility by the will of him who subjected it in hope; look at the infinite God electing one man Abram through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed; look at God delivering his people through the Red Sea on dry ground and getting glory over Pharaoh with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; look at the lightning of God and hear the thunder of his voice at Sinai and the revelation of his name and his holy will; look how he spreads a table in the wilderness to feed a rebellious and stiff-necked people; look how the Jordan opens and the wicked cities of Canaan fall before the Lord as he fights for Israel; look at the people in spite of it all rejecting God as their king and asking to be ruled by a man like all the nations, and God with incomparable mercy not casting his people away, but giving them their king and promising that through this very line a redeemer would come to banish ungodliness from Jacob and to purchase salvation for all the world.

My calling as a pastor is to live and preach for the advancement and joy of your faith. My aim is that all your hope be pinned on God, not man or things. And the Apostle Paul said that, "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by the steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). The most hopeful thing in all the world is that the God with whom we have to do is the God of the Bible. If we come to know this God in his great historical acts, the growing tree of our faith and hope will have deep root and strong fiber and will not be easily blown over by moral or doctrinal temptation. May the Lord strengthen my hand in this work and open all our eyes to his greatness and mercy.

The foundation of all redemptive history is this sentence: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Therefore we confess at the beginning of our creed: "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." By this we mean that God created out of nothing everything that is not God. Nothing but God the Son and God the Spirit is co-eternal with God. There is one God and therefore one ultimate origin of all that is. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever!" (Rom. 11:36). But since he is one God in three persons we also believe--as the scriptures teach--that "Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 1:15,16; cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; John 1:1; Hebrews 1:2). God the Father through the Son created out of nothing everything that is not God. The great mystery of creation is how something can come from nothing. Yet Paul writes in Romans 4:17 that "God calls into being things that are not as though they were." "God commanded and they were created," the psalmist says (Ps. 148:5). God addresses his command to nothingness and even nothingness obeys his voice and becomes something (cf. Hebrews 11:3). If you ever start to doubt the word of God think on this: God can issue a command that is so powerful that if nothing is there to obey, the word itself brings forth its own obedience through creation out of nothing.

If all that is not God came into being at the word of God then it follows that every second of our existence is owing to the word of God. The Biblical teaching is that no creature has a principle of ongoing existence in itself apart from God's perpetual preservation. Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. If God should ever cease to address your body and soul with the command, "Be!", you would cease to be. The only barrier between you and nothingness is the word of God. Have we even begun to plumb the depths of that saying "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4,

Deut. 8:3)!

Since the same divine word that brought all things into being also holds them in being moment by moment, the scriptures do not treat creation as a finished act. But the appearance of every new life is seen as God's creation. Psalm 104:29,30 says of the animals, "When thou (God) hidest thy face they are dismayed; when thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When thou sendest forth thy Spirit they are created and thou renewest the face of the ground." The same thing is implied about every human too when Ecclesiastes 12:1 says, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth," and when Isaiah says, "Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles?' (45:9). In other words, we all relate to God as creator just as much as if we had been the first person made from the dust of the ground. It does not matter that we have come largely from the union of sperm and egg and the multiplication of cells through nutrition and molecular activity, because all these processes are so completely governed by the all-preserving word of God that we are as much clay in the potter's hand as was Adam.

So the Biblical doctrine (or if you prefer the Biblical picture of God) before us is this: God the Father, through the agency of his eternal Son created out of nothing all that is not God by his word of command, and by that same word he upholds all things so that the emergence of every new being is his peculiar creation.

Now what are the implications for our life today of this amazing picture of God. I will mention only three. First, if God is the creator of all things out of nothing, then he owns all things and all people absolutely. The scripture infers ownership from creation. Psalm 95:5, "The sea is his for he made it." Psalm 89:11, "The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine; the world and all that is in it, thou hast founded them." Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." God owns all things absolutely. We may think of ourselves as owners only in relation to other people. That is, they have no right to take certain things from us without compensation. But in relation to God we own nothing, absolutely nothing and he has every right to dispose of us all our so-called possessions exactly as he pleases. This means that with regard to our possessions we are stewards or trustees of God's estate and with regard to ourselves we are slaves of the Almighty. It is very wrong to think that a tithe of our income belongs to God and 90% belongs to us. It is all God's absolutely, and we have no rights to dispense it in any way but what pleases its Owner. The doctrine of creation implies that we should ask of every expenditure: Am I by this purchase achieving the purposes of my Creator?

Not only does God own our possessions, he also owns us absolutely. We are the clay and he is the potter and he may do with us exactly as he pleases (Ps. 29:16; 45:9). "Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me thus?' Has the potter no right over the clay... ?" (Rom. 9:20-21). The answer is, Yes, the potter has absolute right over the clay. Take your spiritual temperature here. If this is sweet to you and you readily submit to God's ownership, it is the mark of grace and maturity in your life. But if this is offensive to you and you resent the thought of God having an absolute right to do with you as he pleases, it is a mark of the flesh and of need for repentance. For the very essence of the flesh is brazen self-assertion, the will to be autonomous, the desire to assert one's rights over against God and determine one's own life. But the rise of saving faith is markedly the collapse of our rebellion against the rights of our Owner. The marrow of saving faith is the laying down of the arms of self-determination; it is total surrender to the will of our Creator, our owner.

A second implication of the doctrine of creation is that everything that exists has a purpose, a goal, a reason for being. If God did not create the world then any man's goal is as good as another. There are no absolutes and everything is aimless and absurd. The only meaning in life is what you arbitrarily create by doing your own thing. But if God did create the world then it has an absolute purpose and goal, for God is not whimsical or frivolous. Nor is his purpose ever in jeopardy for he says in Isaiah 46:10, "My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose."

The ultimate purpose of God in creation was and is to display his glory in all its fullness. According to Numbers 14:21, God's intention to fill the earth with the glory of the Lord is as certain as his very existence. He says in Isaiah 43:7, "I created Israel for my glory." And in Ephesians 1:12 rebellious creatures are brought back to God for this purpose: "to live for the praise of his glory."

Since God created everything he owns everything, everything we have and are belongs to God. Therefore we must ask of every expenditure and every act, "Does this achieve the purpose of my owner?" And now we know what this purpose is and so we must ask, "Does this purchase or this act or this attitude display God's glory?" Thus the second implication of the doctrine of creation is that God has a purpose in creation, to display his glory, and therefore the purpose of all his creatures is to join him in that aim. That's why we exist.

The final implication of this doctrine that I want to mention is simply this: If we are creatures, we are totally and utterly dependent on our creator for everything. We are weaker than the weakest baby apart from him, because apart from him we fly into nothingness. Every breath we take, every calorie of energy we expend, every good intention we fulfill is a gift from our merciful Creator who owes us nothing. So the lesson is clear: you can't glorify God as the all-sufficient Creator and Sustainer unless you turn and become like little children who gladly depend on their Father for everything.

And with that we close this circle. The foundation of all redemptive history is that God the Father, through the agency of his eternal Son created out of nothing all that is not God by his word of command, and by that same word he upholds all things so that the emergence of every new being is his peculiar creation. Therefore, God owns everything that exists. We and all our so-called possessions are his to do with as he pleases. What pleases him is the achievement of his ultimate purpose to fill the earth with his glory. Therefore, the all encompassing life-goal of every creature should be to display the value of God's glory. But since we are helpless and absolutely dependent on God for everything, the only way this can be done is by becoming like little children who are not anxious for anything, but entrust their souls to the faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19).

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