

Prayers

To God

Pray by speaking out loud. Find somewhere quiet and private and speak out loud your confession of sin to Almighty God. If you cannot think of any sin, then search your heart.

For myself

Ask the Lord to bless you in the tasks you do today, not the grand scheme of what you do, but the little details that define your relationship with your work

For others

Weekly theme: Justice

**Almighty God, come to Your people with
Power to save and to redeem,
Vision to inspire and lead,
Strength to face that darkest problems
Authority to command and achieve
Compassion to heal and comfort
And love to be generous to all
Almighty God, come to Your people,
For they know who you really are. AMEN**

Meditation

I stand beneath the Cross of Christ.

It speaks to me of love unspeakable,
It shouts at me the shame of humanity;
It cries to me the tears of tragedy,
It weeps to me the pain of animosity;
It silences me and drowns my thoughts,
It stops my heart and drains my spirit;
It numbs my senses and my gnawing grief,
It ends the world for me; but not for You:

For here beneath the Cross of Christ,
I find my faith and also my humanity;
The worlds of heaven and earth are one,
And love begins to conquer all my sin.

And, as I stand beneath the Cross of Christ
I find it empty, and my needy soul renewed!

Bible Passage

Genesis 2:4-7

⁴ This is the record of when the heavens and the earth were created. On the day the LORD God made the earth and the heavens ⁵ (before any cultivated plants or herbs had grown in the ground, for the LORD God had not made it rain on the earth, and there was no one to work the ground, ⁶ but a mist rose from the earth which gave water to the ground) ⁷ then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nose the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Review

This amazing passage of Scripture begins what is generally called the second great story of Creation in Genesis. You may recall that we closed yesterday's passage with the first part of verse 4, which reads like a conclusion to the classic description of God's creative acts in seven days found at the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 1:1-2:4:a). However, you will see that I have included this verse here at the beginning of this, the next part of the story of Creation in Genesis. Here, the words, *'this is the record of when the heavens and the earth were created'* sound like a good start to what happens next! Perhaps we should come down on one side or the other and say which story it belongs to, the former or the latter, but this would not be the only place in scripture where a sentence performs the task of both concluding what has gone before and also introducing what comes next. Literature has never been so predictable that we must assume that these words must be part of one story or another, when they might simply link the two.

So what is new about the story we now read in Genesis 2? What does it tell us different from what we have already learned about the story of Creation in Genesis 1? If the first great story in Genesis (1:1-2:4a) is a panoramic description of Creation with the creation of people at its climax (1:27), then the second (2:4-3:24), is almost completely focussed on the creation of people, initially the figure of 'Adam', and we will come across 'Eve' later on in the chapter (2:). Some people have described Genesis 2 as like a snapshot of Genesis 1:26,27 opened up, to give a detailed picture of the creation of humanity. That may be true, but it is equally possible that this is a completely different story of Creation from a fundamentally human perspective.

The story begins with these words, *'on the day that the Lord God made the earth and heavens'*, and the words *'earth and heaven'* are the opposite order to how they were used in Genesis 1. This tells us we are about to read a story focussed on earth, not on the heavens, and you will find that there are no other references to the heavens made in chapter 2 of Genesis after verse 4. The story tells us that the world was made from what sounds in verses 5 and 6 to be like a wasteland in a foggy mist. Is this the same primeval chaos we read about in Genesis 1:2? Perhaps so, but after emphasising that this wasteland contained no signs of life (*'there was no one to work the ground'* – 2:5), we are told amazing news. The narrator of the story says dramatically; *'then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nose the breath of life, and the man became a living being'* (2:7)!

This famous description of the making of '*man*', or '*adam*', is a fundamental text within the whole Bible. It describes how God took the elements of the earth, to make humanity and then breathe into '*Adam*' to give him life as we understand it. This breathe of God is written in Hebrew with the same word '*ruach*' used in the Genesis 1 story to describe the '*Spirit of God*' that '*breathed on the face of the waters*' (1:2). Moreover, when the man received this Spirit of God, the text says that he became a '*living being*', and for this, the Hebrew word '*nephesh*' is used, meaning '*soul*'. Now having set this all out from the text, it can be simplified; for where science says that the equation defining the entire universe is Einsteins famous '*E equals MC squared*', God's equation for the creation of a human being is this; '*body*' plus '*spirit*' equals '*soul*'.

The forming of '*adam*' from the dust of the ground tells us a great deal about both God and His creation '*adam*'. For previous generations to ours, the word '*man*' ('*adam*') was used generically, to refer to both men and women. This is not now regarded as good literary practice, though later on in Genesis 2, God creates Eve and separates out from '*adam*' the two characteristics of '*male*' and '*female*' (2:21-25). In later studies attached to the famous genealogies in Genesis, I will share with you some of my own understanding of who this person '*Adam*' might be, and there are some positive scholarly indications that it might be reasonable to try and identify this person within real history. You may be surprised.

The second story of Creation is distinguished from the first by something important, which is the word used for '*God*'. Some people find it hard to accept that Genesis 2 begins a different story of Creation, even though the two are so obviously related, but one reason this is said is because the word for '*God*' used in Genesis 2:4f. is quite different from the one used in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Genesis 1:1-2:4a is characterised by the term '*God*' (Hebrew, '*Elohim*'), however, the second story begun today is characterised by the term '*the Lord God*', and this is a composite Hebrew word, roughly, '*JHWH Elohim*'. This passage introduces the name we later find is special to God, the word '*JHWH*', and it was very significant to the people of Israel. This is the sacred name of God revealed to Abraham and Moses, and its use here tells us that this second story has special value which adds to the great introductory story of Creation in Genesis 1.

Every detail of these stories here in Genesis are rich with detail and worth our further study.

Discipleship

Application

Who is at the centre of the universe?

The heart of this study is the description of the creation of Adam by God and His placement of him in the Garden of Eden. Eden, its location and contents will be a subject for tomorrow, but it is worth dwelling on the powerful images we have been given of the creation of Adam.

Although modern science does not like this, Genesis says that people are the focus and the centre of the Universe, and the reason for its creation and existence. For this reason, the stories of Genesis all work outward from human experience and do not assume an independent scientific structure. The first story of Creation gives a timetable for sequentially experiencing God's work, culminating in the God-like spiritual self awareness of humanity; it is as if Genesis 1 is the story of a child growing up and gradually coming to know its surroundings. The record is signed off by God as a birth Certificate in Genesis 4:a!

The importance of the 'second story of creation'

The second story however is more gritty and determined, its language is ancient and coarse, but it goes to the heart of the deepest philosophical questions people ask. Who are we? Why are we on this earth? The first of these questions is answered directly with the minimum of fuss. We are made from the same 'stuff' as everything else God made (the dust of the ground), but we are made into living beings not merely by dictat from God. He has breathed His Spirit into us. This means that all the distinctive qualities by which we recognise human existence as compared to animal existence are the result of God's Spirit with us. We are not talking about mental awareness or language or even feelings, but about our nature as spiritual beings, conscious not simply of ourselves and our surroundings, but of maker, God

A personal comment

Today, I have issued a challenge to look carefully at what it means to talk of the Christian soul, spirit, and body. I will share with you what I think: my body is physical, yes, but also contains my brain, which is the seat of all my knowledge and thinking and feeling. I think of my spirit as that within me which came from God when He breathed life into me in my mother's womb. My spirit reflects God's Spirit and responds to it, but being part of me, it is fallen. When I talk of my soul, I mean 'me', as a living person. Think about these things and refer to the scriptures; God will guide you into how you understand yourself, your 'being'.

Ideas for what to do

- How is the whole world affected by humanity, and to what extent is it possible to think of the world existing without human life? You may need some time to think about this, but it is worth thinking hard about the relationship between the earth and we who dwell on it.
- Pray for all those who look after the earth and tend it; farmers, scientists, and others who care for what happens to it at a time in the life of the world when we do not know how long it will last.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What pictures are conjured up in your mind by verses 5 and 6? Share this with a group and discuss what it means.
2. Discuss the words, 'body', 'soul', 'spirit'. What do each of these words mean.
3. Do you believe that the bible has said everything it wishes to say about Creation in Genesis 1 and 2? Where else can we find out about creation in the Bible?

Final Prayer

Heavenly Father, reassure us of Your constant love. In weakness, we stumble and fall from the heights for which You have made us. When we look to You, lift us up, that we may see again the glory for which You have made us, and for which, in Your strength, we live. In Jesus' name we ask this; AMEN