

True rest

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[0 : 00] Well, I think there's one thing that all humans everywhere want, no matter what their creed or culture or race or age.

I think the thing that we all want is not money or fame or power. I think lots of people want those things. But the thing that universally every human being wants more than anything else is rest. True rest. As any mother of young children will agree. But the rest I'm talking about is not just physical rest.

It's the rest that the Bible talks about. True rest, both inwardly and outwardly. Being in a state of peace, having everything you need and want.

And not having any anxiety about the future. And where you're at real peace with the people around you. And with nature, with the world around you.

[1 : 00] And you're at peace in your own heart. Am I right? That is the thing that we all actually want. It's the one thing that everybody works towards. In fact, rest.

Ironically, people work really hard to just get that state of rest in their life. To be in a state where they don't have to worry about the future.

To be in a state where they know they have what they need. And yet, the more we chase after it, the further away it seems to get. The more we try to pursue this elusive rest, the more we stress ourselves out.

And the harder it becomes to really be at rest. And that's the state of our world, really. In summary, is people buzzing around, running around, trying to find just a little bit of rest.

And that is very surprising, given that rest is what our world was made for. When we read the creation account in Genesis 1, we discover that everything ended up, everything that was created, ended up and culminated in a state of rest.

[2 : 13] Human beings find themselves, by the beginning of Genesis 2, in a really good place, having rest. Having all that they could want without any anxiety.

No worries. And the whole creation, and even God himself, are all at rest. So, you know, chapter 2, the first few verses, which is the culmination of the creation account, says, Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing, and so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

And then we read chapter 2, which we're going to look at in more detail next week. But we find that the state that creation was then in, after all the work had been done, the state is further described. And we discover that humans and God are in perfect, peaceful relationship with one another and with the world around them. Even humans and animals are in peace, are at rest.

[3 : 23] Everything is in a state of true rest, inwardly and outwardly. And so, if that's the picture we get at the beginning of the Bible, the obvious question that we should be asking is, Well, whatever happened to that?

And that's, I think, one of the purposes of how things are set up at the beginning of the Bible. We see this state of rest being created. And it should lead us to question, Well, what went wrong? And of course, as we read on, it doesn't take long before we discover what went wrong. When we read Genesis chapter 3, which, as I say, we're getting to in the next few weeks. But to truly understand that, before we get there, before we actually unpack everything that went wrong in Genesis chapter 3, we first, this morning, need to understand what made this state of rest possible to begin with.

What needed to happen before day 7 for creation to be in a state of rest? What are the ingredients of rest?

That's really the theme this morning. That's the question I want us to be asking. What are the ingredients that we see in days 1 to 6 which created a state of rest?

[4 : 40] Because if we work that out, then maybe we can work out how to get that rest back that we're all chasing after so frantically. And so let's have a look at Genesis chapter 1 and try to answer that question.

Alright, so the way it all starts is very far, in fact, from the world of rest and peace we find in chapter 2. In fact, it's the very opposite. Genesis 1, verse 1.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Okay, so this is how it all began before anything else. Everything was formless and empty and all there was were deep waters and darkness and the Spirit of God hovering over it all.

Now that word, interestingly, in the Hebrew, spirit, is also the exact same word for wind. And many commentators of Genesis take this phrase, the Spirit of God was hovering or blowing or fluttering over the waters.

[5 : 52] They take this as a deliberate double meaning. That God was present, definitely, in His Spirit. But there was also literally a great wind blowing over these deep, dark, stormy waters.

And that idea of the wind blowing as well adds to the effect of this dark, stormy chaos being pictured here at the beginning.

I don't know if you've ever been at sea in a storm. I've had the privilege and it is both thrilling and terrifying at the same time.

Because around you, your entire environment is in chaos and it's out of control. You cannot do anything to control it. One thing you cannot do in a storm at sea is rest.

You cannot be in a state of rest. It's the very opposite. A storm at sea is the very opposite thing to being in a state of rest. And so creation began in a state of unrest.

[6 : 54] And what chapter 1 is here to teach us is the process that brought it from unrest to rest. In a week.

And so what was that process? Well, we discover a number of vital ingredients in this transformation process from unrest to rest. And the first vital ingredient to create this state of rest was God's Word.

God's Word. The moment God starts to speak, chaos starts to become undone. Did you notice that as Elil was reading that reading for us?

Nothing happens in this chapter without God speaking first. The repetition of the phrase, God said, God said, God said.

Verse 3, verse 6, verse 11, verse 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29. The point is that nothing is happening. No order is coming. No chaos is being undone without God speaking.

[8 : 01] Everything that happens to create this transformation process of chaos to order happens as a result of God's Word. Very important to notice that.

And that's the kind of key ingredient that the first chapter of the Bible is trying to sell us. I think, you know, God's Word is quite important if we're going to try to seek rest.

If we want to get this rest back that we're all looking for, God's Word is essential, just like it was in creation, to creating a state of rest in the world, in creation, and in our lives.

The second vital ingredient, though, was law and order. Law and order. I'm not talking about the TV series. There was law and order in Genesis chapter 1.

Now I know what you're asking, if you're listening, and that is, well, where's the law? We thought the law only comes later, you know, when God gives His law to Moses. Where's the law in Genesis chapter 1? Well, it's in the separation.

[9 : 00] You notice, again, there's a number of times that God separated things. And really, that's what law is. It separates and distinguishes things. Moral law separates and distinguishes right from wrong.

Natural laws separate and distinguish different elements and teach us how they interact. Whether it's chemistry or physics or whatever, it's all about separation and distinguishing.

And so you see God making laws of nature here in separating things. Verse 4, He separates light and darkness. Verse 6, He separates the waters.

Verse 14, He separates day and night. This separation is necessary for an ordered creation. And then, God makes the sun, moon, and the stars.

Why does He do that? Well, the Bible tells us why He made them. Not just to be pretty and to be amazing, which they are. But, verse 14, Let them serve as signs to mark sacred times and days and years.

[10:07] In other words, To create an ordered world, God makes a huge clock in the sky.

A huge timepiece to keep things on schedule. Better than any Rolex timepiece that man could ever come up with. And that's what the sun, the moon, and the stars do.

And they have done since the beginning of history. The sun helps us to know what part of the day we're in. The moon helps us to know what part of the month we're in. And the stars help us to know what part of the year we're in.

Now, you'll say, Well, we've got calendars and clocks and, you know, the internet and Google Calendar. But where do those get their information from? Well, they all get their information from God's clock that He's put in nature around us every day.

In fact, the stars and the moon and the planets are the most accurate timepieces in existence. And completely consistent. Completely predictable and consistent.

[11:09] It's amazing. They're the opposite of chaos. When we look at the stars, when we look at the sun rising, when we look at the moon and its phases, we are to be reminded that that is the opposite of chaos.

That there is a God of order ordering things out of the chaos. That's what the universe is there to remind us every day. And it does.

It's completely consistent. You can predict to the second when a particular star will be in a particular place in a thousand years' time. I've got this astronomy program on my computer, which is really fascinating.

You can fast forward in time. You can look back in time and see where the stars and the planets and the moon and stuff are going to be. And about a month ago, I was just tinkering around. And I saw that on this last Tuesday, which was still in the future then when I was on my computer, there was going to be a lunar eclipse.

The Earth was going to pass in front of the sun and block it out from the moon at 8.43.51 p.m. on Tuesday. And it happened exactly to the second.

[12:17] It's completely predictable. Yesterday, if you were aware of anything in the world, you would have known that we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landings.

And the only reason that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin and all of them could land on the moon was because they knew exactly where it was going to be at exactly the right time for them to work out the geometry in their rockets and getting there on time because of the consistency and the predictability of the way our universe is structured.

You see, God's making the point in all of this that he is a God of order and creation itself is God slowly but surely undoing the chaos and bringing us to a state of order and rest.

Separating, putting things in their place, setting up systems, creating different habitats and then filling those habitats with creatures perfectly fitted for those habitats.

Not by some random processes as secular so-called science would have you believe, but through an intentional process of ordering and setting up intelligently.

[13:37] And all of these things are necessary. All of these things are ingredients for true rest, order and systems and predictability. You know what I mean. Your life is only in any state of rest when you can predict what's going to happen in the next minute or the next hour.

When there's some kind of order. When your life is totally in chaos, you're not at rest, right? When there's order, you are. So order and predictability are necessary for a state of rest.

Okay, so then we've got kind of up to the first five days and God is separating and God is speaking and there's the chaos is being undone and order and law and separation are coming into this world.

But then even after all of these things are made, there's something missing. Something else was still needed for creation to be at rest. And you know what it is? You and me.

Us. We were the missing ingredient. See, only when humans arrived was the transformation from chaos to rest complete. Why?

[14:46] Why are you and I so necessary for rest? It doesn't seem like we fit that job description, does it? When we just look at our lives and look at our world.

But the reason that human beings were so necessary for creation to be at rest was because of who we were made to be and what we were made to do. So read with me from verse 26.

Then God said, Now, I didn't plan to say this, but as I was reading that, I picked up something else. You see God's separation of mankind into male and female. Again, law, order in human sexuality, which is something, again, that the world and its secular views drifts away from.

In fact, all the major problems in the world can be rooted down to us going against the created order that God made in Genesis 1. Just something interesting to see.

[16:21] There's law even in human sexuality here. There's law in separation, which is being eroded in our world. But what I want you to notice here is that unlike anything else that God made, mankind, when he makes people, we are unique in one very important way.

Did you see what it was? Nothing else has this, but we do. What is it? Tell me. The image. The image of God. Did you notice that? Humans alone are made in God's image.

So what does that mean? Well, it could mean many things. And people have speculated as to, well, not speculated, but they've defined a number of different aspects of what it means to be made in God's image.

That we can create, that we can communicate, that we can love. Those kind of things are aspects of being made in God's image.

But the main idea that comes out of this passage as to what it means to be made in God's image is the idea of representation and authority. And that would have been well understood for someone reading this in the ancient world because in those days, kings would call themselves the image of their gods.

[17:34] Whatever gods, false gods they worshipped, they would be, they would call them, there would be this phrase that they used, that they are the image of the gods. And what that means is that they represented and exercised the authority of the gods on earth.

Well, that's what it meant to ancient years to be the image of God. It meant that ruling on God's behalf. But here in Genesis, we discover that it wasn't just one or two people, kings or leaders of nations, who were meant to be the images of God, but all of us were.

That's exactly what God made all humans to be. Images of God. Representatives of His authority and rule to the world. To rule creation in His name.

And to use the order and the law and the system that He's put in place to develop this world in order and rest and take it forward into what it is meant to be.

Under God's direction from His word and enjoying His provision as we do that. Did you notice the very next line says how God has set up the world to provide everything we need as we work for Him.

[18:42] Another interesting comparison with an alternative creation account in those days. By the way, Genesis 1 is also written as a, as we'll see in our growth groups when we studied this week, as a way to oppose a lot of the false creation accounts that were around in the world in those days and ever since.

Because every age has its own creation account. And Genesis 1 is here to oppose the wrong ones, to correct our understanding of how we came about and why we came about.

But in those days, the Babylonians had a, had the most famous creation account. And in that creation account, there's a number of things that are weird.

Like humans were designed only as an afterthought of the gods because they were hungry and they needed someone to feed them. Sacrifices.

And so they created humans just to, to feed them and supply them with what they needed. And then later they wiped them out because they were getting too noisy. But anyway, here in the Genesis creation account, we read the exact opposite.

[19:55] It wasn't the humans feeding God created as an afterthought. It was God feeding humans with what they needed because He made them for a purpose that was central to His creation.

Do you see that? So humans have a very special place in creation and a very special purpose. And we must remember that in a world, again, that is eroding the value of humanity.

And our special purpose is that we were made to work for God, to be His representatives. And He was going to, as we worked for Him and did our jobs, He promised to compensate us really well with everything we need.

Of course, it turns out we weren't very good employees and we actually got fired. We'll see in the coming weeks how that happened. And that's why we're in a state of now having to provide for ourselves and why we're worrying and why we're running around anxious and why the world is no longer in a state of order and rest because humanity got fired from our job, which was essential for the rest and the order in creation.

But now before we think about that and what it means, I just want us to pause for a second and think, what does this mean for human beings and how we look at human beings?

[21 : 17] Because I think that's a very important factor to consider in our world today. Because despite what went wrong later on in the story, this Genesis 1 tells us that we are firstly more than animals.

We are much, much more than mere animals. And we have a special role and we have dignity as human beings. We have value.

Every human being, no matter how poor or dirty or smelly they might be, they are made in the image of God. And they have a special place, a special role that God has made them for.

And that is a fact that is less and less believed in our world as our society today is adopting its own alternate creation stories.

Just like the Babylonians did with the noisy humans. Every age has its own origin story which opposes the truth. And today's one is the idea that, well, it's the theory of evolution, isn't it?

[22 : 18] It's the idea that everything came about randomly, the very opposite of the point of creation. It came about randomly by pure chance and without any purpose.

Obviously the reason why I think this is such a popular origin story for people to latch on to, even if they know nothing about science and they realize there's no actual evidence for it, people don't care.

They just latch on to it. But why? Why is it so popular? Well, it's because it takes away human responsibility, doesn't it? If we have no purpose, then there's no right and wrong way to live.

And we can live how we want. If we believe that we all just came about randomly with our purpose, then it gives us license to do what we want with our lives.

But the unintended consequence of that is it also takes away our human dignity. It takes away our value as well. It makes humans no more than well-developed animals who discovered fire, fortunately for them, and invented the wheel.

[23 : 27] But other than that, we're just animals. So do you see how the origin story that we choose to adopt actually determines how we view ourselves, how we view what we're doing here, and how we view the people around us?

The origin story that you and I believe and that the people out there believe is essential for how we interact in our lives, how we live, and what we live for, how we treat other people.

If we believe that we are no more than animals, then how does that mean for how we live our lives? Well, if we believe we're no more than animals, we will be quite happy to just be directed and driven by our animal instincts, our physical instincts for sex and food and power.

And we won't believe that we have any higher calling than just to answer our animal instincts. And that's what the world is like today. People are living just by their physical instincts.

And in society, having an origin story where we believe we are no better than the animals will lead to obviously a disregard for human life and the value of human life.

[24 : 39] If we're no different from animals, why should I treat my neighbor any better than the chicken I ate for supper? Or the ox that pulls the plow? Why should I?

Why should I give my neighbor any value in my life? You see, and that's what it leads to is exploitation, which we see in our world. It leads to wealth inequality.

It leads to the rich exploiting the poor, the powerful exploiting the weak. And of course, it leads to the extermination of unborn babies if they're inconvenient, which we see all over our world in legalized abortion.

Because, you know, if they're just animals, then they're just a collection of cells and may as well just put them in the bin. Except they're not. They're not just animals. They're not just a collection of cells. See, if we have the right origin story and we recognize that humans have a special place in God's creation and that we have a special purpose and a special value and dignity, then it will change how we see our own lives and what we're doing here and it will change how we see our neighbors, how we treat the people around us, no matter who they are.

[25 : 47] Do you see how our origin story, Genesis chapter 1, is so essential for everything else that follows? I hope you see that this morning. But now, back to the point of Genesis.

The fact that this world is not a place of rest and order is because we are not fulfilling the purpose for which we are made. I hope that makes sense to you now and I hope you see from Genesis. I'm not saying that. That's what I believe is the main point of Genesis chapter 1. That us fulfilling the purpose for which we are made is an ingredient for rest and order and therefore if there's no rest and order, which it's evident there's not, then we are not fulfilling our purpose as human beings. Our job to rule God's creation as his image bearers under his word, we are not doing that. And the results are fairly clear to see.

We fail to manage our environment. Well, it's predicted by 2050 there will be more plastic in the oceans than fish, for example, of how bad we are at managing creation.

[26 : 55] We failed to manage society, our communities, in law and order. Since the beginning of the year, more than a thousand people have been killed in gang violence in the Cape Flats because we don't know how to run a society.

We failed even to manage our own homes and families. I don't need to tell you of the problems that families have and homes have and marriages have because we fail to bring God's word and order and rest and peace into those situations.

Okay, so what's the solution for these things? Seeing we fail to manage creation and our lives, what is the solution? To use less plastic, to use paper straws. Is that going to fix the environment?

To put the army into the Cape Flats? Is that going to fix the society? Are these things going to solve the problems? No. They might be helpful in the short term, but they're not going to solve the problem because it doesn't address the root cause of the problem, which is that we as humans have failed in our task as God's image bearers because we have failed to live under his word.

And because of it, Paul says in Romans, creation is groaning because of us. Creation is suffering.

[28 : 16] Creation is groaning. A creation that's meant to be ruled by God's image bearers is groaning in a state of chaos all because we thought we could do better without God.

Well, it's quite obvious we can't. And so what this world really needs is not for us to use paper straws.

It helps. It's probably going to help preserve our world for a few more centuries, maybe, but it's not going to solve the real problem. You know what we need? What our world needs is a new image bearer who properly represents God and who rules under God and who we can follow and listen to, which is exactly what Jesus came to be.

That's exactly how the New Testament represents the person and work of Christ as the new image of God. Listen to how Paul puts it in Colossians.

I'll just read it for you. Listen, the Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, and He is the head of the body, the church.

[29 : 26] He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all of His fullness dwell in Him and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood shed on the cross.

So what this tells us is that Jesus is now the image bearer of God who is going to be given supremacy over all things so He can do the job that we failed to do and manage this world in peace and rest.

And that's what He's going to do. He is currently working on taking over, making His enemies His footstool.

But here's the good news for us. Through what He did on the cross to take away our sins, to make us fit for God, He brings us back into employment. He gives us jobs again as humans, as God's image bearers on earth, so that we can take up our original creation role again to rule this world properly under Him.

So when will that happen? When will God's people rule this world again properly under Him? Well, when He comes back. And that's another thing the Bible is very clear on. When Jesus comes back to destroy His enemies and gather His people, He's going to then recommission us to do what we were meant to do from the beginning.

[30 : 57] And that is to rule this world, to take creation forward and to make it into what God intended it to be. And if you repent and believe and follow Jesus as the image of God, you can also

be part of that new creation that is coming.

But not only that, even now, before He comes back, you can be part of the new creation He is making. Part of this recreation, which has already started when He rose from the dead.

And so, just as with the first creation, when the Spirit of God was hovering over the chaos, ready to bring life and light and order, so today, He is doing that again through the church.

He is hovering over the chaos of this world, ready to bring life and light and order into it through the church, through you and me. That is what we are here for.

To bring life and light and order into communities and families and lives. True rest can be had again.

[32 : 12] it is available but only through obeying the true image bearer, Jesus Christ. And as we do that, and as we obey Him, and as we listen to Him, and as we, as He said, just before He ascended to take His throne, He said to us, make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

As we do that, as we learn to obey everything Jesus has commanded, then we begin to show the world around us the order and rest that He came to make possible. And we show them through how we live and how we, for example, rule and order our own families and our homes under His word in good, regular habits.

Ordered habits. Not chaos. We show the world this aspect of this recreation in how we interact in society by upholding law and order and justice, especially to the oppressed, to the image bearers who the world gives no value.

We should be the ones who give them value and show the world their value. Upholding human dignity for the least of God's image bearers because we know who they really are.

Even though that image is marred, even though we as humanity have been, you know, people who aren't restored in Christ have been fired from their jobs, we can bring them back into helping them to know what their real role and their real value is through the gospel.

[33 : 48] It's in how we look after our environment as its caretakers, not its exploiters. And that will be seen in how we interact in our society and how we interact in our world.

Caring for the world that God has made and the animals and the elements of creation that we are meant to be caring for. But ultimately, this rest and us showing recreation to this world comes only when we listen to God's word.

Right? God's word in Genesis 1 is the key in order to undo this process of chaos and bring rest and order. Nothing happens without God speaking.

Well, it's the same today. It's always how God brings order out of chaos. But now, the difference is we, you and me, are the bearers of that word.

And so, how much speaking he does out there to transform that chaos will depend on how willing we are to take this word out there. If we keep it to ourselves, chaos will rule.

[34 : 57] If we take it out there into people's lives and we share God's word and these truths and especially the gospel of Jesus Christ with our work colleagues and our family members and our friends, that's when God's light and spirit will shine and bring order into the chaos.

But we are the bearers of that word. Do you see what an awesome responsibility is? The word that is going to transform the world, we are the ones who decide whether to keep it to ourselves or to take it out there and to take it into the lives of broken image bearers of God so that they too can rediscover their purpose in this world and experience true rest and share with us the hope of restored creation where we will once again rule under God and make this world into what God has always intended it to be.

Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you for the correct creation account, the correct origin story that we can live by and order our lives by.

We think of the false origin stories in the world around us and we pray, Lord, that you would help us to ensure that this story and the place of your word and the dignity of humans made as image bearers, we pray that those things that we've learned from Genesis 1 will be the foundation of how we live, according to your word and displaying your image to this world and redeeming other image bearers through the gospel.

Help us, Lord, to order our lives according to this. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.