

In the Beginning: Genesis 1:1-2
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On Monday Virginia Tech experienced the deadliest shooting spree in U. S. history. We all watched as the story unfolded, and we learned of this young man who had such anger and rage in his heart that he premeditated this murderous rampage. And we ask ourselves the questions that inevitably come in an event like this. What would make a young man become so malicious and suicidal. How could a person become so bitter and hateful? We may try to blame it on something in his past, or some mental illness, or stressful things about his environment. And there may be legitimate concerns there, but what we need to understand from the Christian worldview is that the fundamental problem is that we are all sinners. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" And Romans 3 says, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

And if God gives us eyes to see, we will understand that the anger and hate demonstrated on Monday at Virginia Tech is the same anger and hate that can easily well up in our hearts, as well. The same sin that caused him to shoot, can cause us to lash out with angry words or make degrading remarks or hold grudges against family members and friends. I certainly know that to be true in my own heart. I can be selfish and impatient, and when things aren't going my way I can become angry. It's only by God's grace that our sin has been restrained, and if we are believers, that our sin is forgiven and is gradually losing its force in our lives. We should praise God for His saving grace, by which He forgives sinners, counts them righteous, and then begins to sanctify them. And we should also praise God for His common grace, which is bestowed on believers and unbelievers alike. God's common grace restrains so much sin and evil, so that even though we are all utterly depraved, our actions are not as harmful as they could be. And we can see evidences of God's grace even in the lives of unbelievers (not meaning that they're saved, but the kind and helpful and heroic things they do are a result of God's common grace). And so the shocking evil of Monday's massacre should make us grateful for the relative peace and security in which we live most of the time. We do live in a messed up world, but it is only by God's undeserved grace that it is not a thousand times worse than it is.

Another question that arises, and seems to become clearer, in an event like this, has to do with the reality of good and evil. In a tragedy like this, or 9/11, or the Holocaust, ethical questions of right and wrong come into focus in a profound way. Our moral outrage shows that there really IS absolute right and wrong. We all know it in our hearts. That is evil. That is wrong. And no moral relativist can tell me that everyone can just do whatever seems right in their own eyes. NO! Certain things are definitely, absolutely, unequivocally wrong! And this week we have witnessed a very clear example of this.

The deep questions of life continue as we wrestle with an evil act like this. We then wonder about God, and His involvement (or lack of involvement) in this atrocity. Where was God? Why would God allow something like this to happen? And for those of us who believe the Bible, and understand from Scripture that God is all-knowing and

all-powerful, and sovereign over His creation, we wonder why God didn't prevent this from happening. And for that matter, if God is all-powerful, why doesn't He just prevent all evil from happening. Why does the world have to be this way?

Why would God choose to create a universe like this, where there is so much pain and suffering and sin and evil? We believe that God is omniscient. He knows all things, past, present, and future. And that means before He created this universe He knew about the shooting at Virginia Tech. He knew about 9/11. He knew about the Holocaust. He knew about the suicide bombers. He knew about all the senseless evil that would bring so much pain and agony to His creatures. And not only did He know, He ordained that the world be this way. So why did He do it? Why didn't He create a world in which evil could not exist? Or why didn't He just not create anything at all?

As I wrestle with these deep and difficult questions of life, I am so grateful to God for the Bible. Praise God that He has revealed Himself to us! Praise Him for giving us this Book that discloses His character and His glory and His mighty deeds throughout history and His plan to save sinners. Without this Book, we would have no answers. Without this Book, we would be left in utter despair. Without this Book, we would have no hope.

This morning, as we think about why God created this world, my desire is that we will find hope and strength and peace, knowing that the Creator of the universe is a Good God, a Happy God, a Triune God, and a Sovereign God. He has a good purpose in everything that happens in this world. He is in control, and He is causing all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). Of course, we don't always understand His purposes. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever." God has not revealed to us every detail of His plans. We don't know the specifics of why He would allow this massacre at Virginia Tech to happen. But we can trust in His goodness and His sovereignty, and for all eternity we will rejoice in Him and in His perfect plan to reveal His glory throughout the history of this creation.

As difficult as it may be to comprehend this right now, I believe it's true, that this is the best of all possible worlds. Of all the worlds God could have created, this is very best. You might object to that and point out all the evil in this world. You might think that God certainly could have created a better world than this if He wanted to.

But this is the best of all possible worlds in this sense: This is the world that most fully reveals God's perfect nature, not only His grace and love, but also His righteousness and holiness and justice and wrath. And God is so passionate about His glory, He has such an intense desire to make Himself known, that He is willing to let bad things happen. He does grieve over these things. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked," He says in Ezekiel 33:11. And we know that God, Himself, never sins or tempts anyone to sin (James 1:13). But God does allow these things to happen as part of His good plan to reveal the beauty of His greatness. He is in control of these things. He ordains them to happen.

In a few weeks when we come to Genesis 3, I'll argue that God not only knew that Adam and Eve would sin, but He planned for that sin to occur as part of His plan to reveal His grace through the redemption of fallen sinners. We are certainly on the brink of profound divine mysteries here. But we must affirm that, even though the fall was

tragic and sad and has brought about incalculable harm, it was, in fact, part of God's plan. It was a pivotal piece in the history of this world, which as I said, is the best of all possible worlds. I'll come back to this at the end of the sermon.

We shouldn't drive ourselves crazy trying to rationally understand all these deep matters. These questions are on the brink of mystery, and we do need to leave to God those things that are secret. But I simply want to inspire in us a great hope in God's sovereignty. He is in control. He has a plan. And we can look forward to the consummation of His kingdom, when we will enter the new heaven and new earth, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. And we will spend eternity praising God for who He is and for what He has done to reveal His perfect character.

We're at the beginning of a sermon series on the book of Genesis, and the main question I want to address this morning is, Why did God create? And especially in light of the evil and suffering that He ordained to be part of His creation, why did He want to do it?

Read Gen 1:1-2

What I want to say this morning is not primarily from the first two verses of Genesis. But with these verses simply as our starting point I want to ask the question that is every relevant to our study of Genesis and very relevant to our lives: Why did God create? Next week we'll look more closely at how God created the world, but today I want to look at the broader revelation of Scripture and talk about WHY He created.

The first words of the Bible tell us that God created. This happened in the beginning, before anything existed. God created the entire universe, the heavens and the earth, out of nothing. He didn't have any raw materials to work with. He didn't just form and organize something that was already there. He brought things into existence that, until that point, did not exist.

Notice in verse 2 that the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Here we see the third Person of the Trinity involved in the act of creation. The Holy Spirit was right there, intimately involved in sustaining and preserving the creation from the very first moment. God the Son is not explicitly mentioned in these two verses, but it is very clear from the New Testament that the Son was involved in creation as well. In fact, John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning [notice that John is intentionally reminding us of Gen 1] was the Word [referring to Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." Jesus Christ could not have been any more involved in creation than He was. God the Father created, and He created everything THROUGH the Son, and the Spirit was there hovering over the creation.

The truth that our God is a Triune God is an extremely important point in understanding WHY God created this universe. This cooperation within the Trinity in the act of creation points to the deepest love imaginable, which has been enjoyed by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit from eternity past. Listen to what Jesus said in His high priestly prayer in John 17. This is the Son praying to the Father, and He says, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (v. 24). Have you ever wondered what was going on before God created the world? Well, one thing we know from this verse is that the Father loved the Son before

the foundation of the world. The three Persons of the Trinity were infinitely happy in the fellowship they had with one another.

Many people think that God created the world because He was lonely. He wanted some company. He created the world and humankind because He was bored, and He needed some people to interact with. He needed us to break the monotony of eternity. That idea could not be further from the truth, because God was anything but bored before He created us. He was most certainly not lonely. To think He was lonely is to completely miss the wonder of the Trinity.

The biblical teaching of the Trinity is something that makes Christianity entirely unique. The God of the Bible is Three Persons and One Being. One God existing as Father, Son and Spirit. This is both incomprehensible and glorious. Other religions and cults deny the truth of the Trinity, but that does nothing to change the fact that the true God, the living God, the God of the Bible is Three-In-One. And the happy fellowship within the Trinity demonstrates God's independence and self-sufficiency. He needs nothing. He doesn't need us or anything in this universe. He was not bored or lonely before He created all of this.

When Paul was preaching to the men of Athens in Acts 17 he said, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (v. 24-25). God has no lack. He has no need. And so as we ask the question, Why did God create the universe?, we can emphatically rule out the possibility that He created in order to fill some void in His life. He didn't create the world because of some need He felt within Himself.

Well, then why DID He create? He didn't NEED to create. He could have been perfectly happy and fulfilled for ever and ever without us. So why did He do it? The Catechism for Young Children that we've been using at home with Milaina begins with the question, "Who made you?" Answer: God. Question 2, "What else did God make?" Answer: God made all things. Then Question 3 is the question we're asking this morning: "Why did God make you and all things?" And the answer is: For his own glory.

If you've been at Grace Church very long, I hope that you anticipated this answer. Because we seek to be a God-centered church, and we cherish the fact that God does everything He does for His own glory. In all of His great acts, His chief goal is to display and highlight how great He is. From the first moment of creation, and everything that God has done throughout history, His plan is to reveal His glory and receive back praise from His people.

Let's look at this in a few texts and try to understand a little better what is meant by saying, "God created the universe for His own glory." First of all, in Isaiah 43:6-7 God says, "I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, DO not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." There it is stated very plainly that God created all of us for His own glory. In 1 Corinthians 8:6 Paul says the same thing, although in this particular verse he doesn't use the word "glory." He writes, "for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

There is another statement of the Son's role in creation, and we also see that we exist "for" God, meaning we exist for His glory. Romans 11:36 says "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." We were created, and everything was created, and God does everything He does, for His own glory.

When the Bible talks about God's glory, it is referring to His greatness, His beauty, His majesty. God's glory, manifested in each of the Persons of the Trinity, was the source of delight as the Father and Son and Spirit communed together before the creation of the world. The perfect divine attributes is what God has always rejoiced in, and what He will always value and esteem and love. And what happened in the act of creation was an overflow of God's delight in Himself. The intense happiness experienced in the fellowship of the Trinity burst forth in creative splendor. Jonathan Edwards, in his book entitled *The End for Which God Created the World*, says, "Surely it is no argument of the emptiness or deficiency of a fountain, that it is inclined to overflow." What a great analogy! You see, God is a fountain, and it is His nature to overflow. God didn't create because of an emptiness or deficiency in Himself, but simply because He is a fountain. God's delight in Himself overflowed in a flood of creative acts designed to show off His glory, to demonstrate His magnificent attributes, to highlight His beauty and power. Which is to say, He created all things for His own glory.

In closing, then, we come back to the question, "Why THIS world?" God created the universe to display the beauty of His greatness. But why did He choose to create this world? Why did He choose to create a world with so much pain and suffering and sin and evil? Why a world in which college students kill their classmates? Why a world in which terrorists fly planes into buildings? Why not a world unstained by sin? Why not a purely good world? I believe the answer is that God would not have been able to demonstrate the fullness of His glory in a world without evil and pain. Think about it for a moment. If there was no fall into sin, there would be no need for redemption. Which means there would be no need for Jesus Christ to sacrifice Himself for sinners. And Christ's sacrificial death for sinners is the climactic display of God's mercy. Also, if there was no fall, God would not be able to display His righteous wrath against sin. And thus we would not see His holiness and goodness and justice with the kind of clarity with which we will see those attributes in this universe. This is the best of all possible worlds, not because it is without sin. It's filled with sin. But because it best displays the full picture of how great our God is.

Before the foundation of the world, the happy Trinity devised a glorious plan for displaying that happiness and drawing others into that happiness. And this plan involved the redemption of many sinners. As Ephesians 1 says, "In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved" (vv. 5-6). Why did God create this universe? Not because He was lonely. Not because He needed anything. But because the delight experienced within the Trinity burst forth to display the glory of God. As a fountain naturally overflows, God overflowed in the creation of this universe. And as a part of His plan to redeem sinners, He created a world in which sin would inevitably enter in. Then, when the time was right, the Father sent His beloved Son into this evil world to live perfectly among sinners, and then to die a brutal death at the hands of sinners. This was infinitely more heinous and appalling than any other evil act in history.

The perfect, sinless, holy Son of God was murdered by prideful men. And yet this was exactly how God planned it. This is how He choose to display the beauty of His attributes.

Trust Him today. Trust in His goodness and His perfect plan. Trust Him with the many questions that may still be lingering in your mind. “Oh, the depth,” Paul says, “of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” (Rom 11:33-34). We don’t presume to know the depths of God’s plans, but we trust Him. And we delight in the beauty of His greatness, to the extent that He has revealed Himself to us. Let’s pray that He will reveal Himself more and more, so that we will delight in Him more and more, and thus He will truly be glorified in our lives.