

Genesis 1:6-8

6 And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water."

7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so.

8 God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day

John 4:1-15

1 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—

2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.

3 So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

4 Now he had to go through Samaria.

5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"

12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Let the waters be separated

Genesis 1:6-8; John 4:1-15

Today we're going to look at the significance of water.

Whenever the subject of life on other planets is mentioned, it's always in connection with the fact that life, at least as we know it, cannot exist without water. So the priority for scientists is to find evidence of it. And from the very beginning water has an important place in the bible as well.

But what I initially wanted to ask is why do we think God even made the universe? When you read these verses at the beginning of Genesis it's the scale of it that hits you. You think of the impossibly huge size of the universe, and then there are these short statements: let there be light, let the waters be separated, and it was so. And then verse 16: *He also made the stars.*

God always existed. His name, for Jews, from the start, was not 'I'm one of many gods'.

It was simply 'I am'. And logically, who could possibly create God?

The universe was caused to exist because God willed it to exist.

These first chapters of Genesis are vital to understand our faith.

I'm not a scientist, but at the beginning of things we can see that God is bringing order out of chaos. Any big bang would initially produce a vast expanding chaos of matter.

But God produced the energy to cause it and then gave shape to it, so that there were planets and stars and meteors and suns. The unseen God who is Spirit created the physical world. But then, for physical life, there needed to be water. And verses 6-8 have God putting the waters where they will bring forth life. Verse 9 takes that a bit further: *9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so.*

And when humans appear, a large proportion of us is water.

Adults are an average of 65% water; newborn babies are 95% water, about the same as a cucumber!

But humans have misused what God has freely provided.

A large proportion of fresh water is now being used for profit, and this has now become a problem, with large corporations like Nestlé taking control of water supplies and selling it at inflated prices in small plastic bottles which take hundreds of years to decompose.

One statistic: since 1970, globally, 83% of freshwater fish have become extinct. 8 out of 10 in 50 years. Let that sink in.

When I spent a weekend in a campervan a few years ago I realised what a precious resource water is when we had to fetch and carry all our water in a container, and it was amazing how quickly it ran out. And yet at home we take it for granted that it comes out of the tap 24/7. That's not the reality for too many people. Currently 60% of the world (4.5 billion) live in areas where the amount of water cannot meet the demand.

In the book *Saying Yes to Life*, which we're using as the basis of this series, Ruth Valerio mentions a community in the DRC (Congo) where the women had to walk a round trip of 2 hours morning and evening to fetch water. Thanks to TearFund, Overseas Development Initiative and Oxfam they now have a well in the village. Ironically other communities, in Bangladesh for example, live in a permanent state of flood, with houses built on mud. One woman had six homes before her last one, each moving back as the sea had risen and the coastline crumbled. That community is now dispersed. But here's the amazing thing that woman had to say: "We don't need any help from outsiders, we can solve our own problems. The only thing we need is solid ground beneath our feet. Just give us that and we will do the rest". While we argue in the West about whether climate change is real, for so many, that's just a criminal waste of breath. Arguing about it doesn't change what the reality is for so many, so we have to become more aware of how the resources God provided are being misused. As Annette pointed out last week, our first job was to look after His creation.

When Jesus sat down by Jacob's well in Sychar, it was hot and he was tired. Water was high on the list of priorities, certainly for the Samaritan woman. She's gasping for a drink, but He turns the conversation around and makes it about the water which is *more real* than the water which keeps her physical body alive.

*"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you **living water**."*

Of course he's using it as a metaphor but throughout the New Testament water is closely associated with the Holy Spirit, who is the presence of God within us. Growing us as people, and washing us clean of sin.

At Jesus' baptism John says this:

Mark 1:8 I baptize you with water, but Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." The water of the Spirit, and not our good deeds, is what saves us, if we allow it. When Jesus spoke in Jerusalem at the feast of tabernacles he said this (*John 7: 37*) in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

To go back to my first question, why did God create the universe, Ruth Valerio in the book points out that because God is love, the universe originates from an overflow of God's love and generosity. She says, quoting a Mennonite theologian, Thomas Finger: Unless we view the universe as something that always existed alongside God, then before the act of creation, 'God was the only reality there was'. Creation could only happen, therefore, 'if God opened up a space within himself, as it were, where this could occur'. The biblical view is that God is separate but closely connected with His creation. The natural world is not divine, but it is sacred. So water and all other naturally occurring things are freely given, by God, but we must use them respectfully and responsibly.

Please do use the cards we've produced, with practical ideas for how to save water, and how to help those who have very little water. I'd like to finish with two bible passages, one from Ezekiel 36 and one from Revelation 22. These are prophetic words and images through which we can allow God to speak life and hope and salvation to us today, now. We need to let God speak through them.

Ezekiel 36 25 *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

And from Revelation.

22 1 *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. Amen*