

Created in His Image (Genesis 1:26-2:3)

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[0 : 00] And I'm going to invite Cheryl now before Ian preaches to read the scripture passage that we'll be looking at. So if you have your Bibles, please turn them on or flip to Genesis 1.

We're going to have the reading from verse 24, the start of the sixth day, through to chapter 2, verse 3. So Cheryl's going to read that for us. And then over to you, Ian.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds, livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.

And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. Then God said, So God created man in his own image.

[1 : 14] In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, And behold, it was very good.

And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done.

And he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it, God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Thank you, Cheryl. So depending on who you ask, arguably one of the best films, in my opinion, to come out in 2016 was Moana.

[2 : 59] So it has a bit of everything, right? It's got a very headstrong female lead character. It's got Polynesian creation myths.

It's got an amazing soundtrack. And it's got a giant talking crap. But there's this one scene where the main character, Moana, she's kind of lost on her raft with Maui, the Polynesian demigod. And he reminds her how to find her way. And he says something like, it's called wayfinding, princess. It's seeing where you're going in your mind, knowing where you are by knowing where you've been.

And so this idea of remembering where you come from and how that then shapes your future destiny isn't unique only to Moana and being stuck in the middle of the ocean.

Humans, they've always recognized that our past and how we're created really shapes what our purpose and our destiny should be as human beings.

[4 : 10] So, for example, we have the American pop singer, Demi Lovato. She says, it doesn't matter where you come from or who you think you are. We're all human beings with beating hearts.

And Lady Gaga, she says something similar. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, how much money you've got in your pocket. You have your own destiny and your life ahead of you. But what does the Bible say about who we really are? Why am I here? And what's the purpose of my life?

And so we find that the passage that we're looking at today gives us the answer to these questions. As we look backwards to why we were created, we don't just look forward to our future destiny, but what it means for us as humans living here in the now.

And so Genesis 1, 26, 2 to 3 tells us that as humans, we're created to, first of all, relate to God.

[5 : 24] Second of all, to be responsible carers of the earth. And third of all, to ultimately to rest and to enjoy him. So before we dive in, let's have a quick prayer.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you just for the amazing God that you are, Lord. Thank you for creating the heavens and the earth. And thank you just for creating us, mankind, in your image and in your likeness.

And Father, as we learn more about the reasons why you created us and what you created us for, Lord, would you help us to believe these things and ultimately to find rest in you and to find rest in your son, Jesus Christ.

We pray all these things in your name, Lord. Amen. So, so far in Genesis 1, we've seen God speak light into being.

He separates it from the darkness. He puts in place orders and boundaries, right? He creates the sky, the land, the seas, the plants, the sun, the moon.

[6 : 34] And then on the fifth day, he fills the entire world with living creatures. And he declares all of it to be good. It's almost like we're building up to verse 26.

The climax, the pinnacle of God's work is finally here. Mankind. Let us make mankind in our image, God says, in our likeness.

And straight away, we notice that there's something which is a little bit different about this next act of creation, don't we? It's very personal.

It's not like the other creative acts. Like in verse 3, where God says, let there be light. Or verse 24, let the land produce living creatures. Here, God's almost announcing what he's about to do.

We're drawn into this next act of creation. So something quite extraordinary is about to happen. And this extraordinary thing is that beings are going to be made in the image of the creator God.

[7 : 47] Now, if we look at verse 26, we see that the Hebrew word for image means a close resemblance of something. But it's not quite identical to the thing itself.

It's something that's cut from an object, like an idol or a sculpture that's cut from a piece of clay. And it's also used to describe something that represents something else as well.

So in ancient Middle Eastern culture, kings would put statues in different parts of their kingdom. So the statues would represent the king and remind the subjects of the king's authority.

So in Daniel chapter 3, we see the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, he builds a massive idol of himself, right? And he commands everyone to bow down to it. And if we keep reading on in verse 26, we see the Hebrew word for likeness is also quite similar.

It's an object that resembles something, but instead of focusing more on the concrete image, it's more the idea of being similar.

[8 : 58] So in Psalm 58, 4, it talks about the venom of the wicked. It is like the venom of a snake. So it has a likeness. To the venom of a snake.

It's poisonous and it's destructive. But wicked people don't actually make snake venom, right? It's the idea that's very similar. So to the original listeners, they would have heard God say something like, let's make mankind to be like us and to represent us.

Now, if we fast forward a couple of chapters, Genesis 5, we see a record of Adam's family line. His son was called Seth. And at verse 3 of chapter 5, it describes him in the same way.

So Seth was a son born to Adam in his own likeness, in his own image. And Seth obviously wasn't a cookie cutter version of his dad, Adam, right?

Just like how we don't look 100% like our mums or our dads, for better or for worse. But we might be taller, we might be shorter, we might have different nose or different ears.

[10 : 04] But there's a likeness. There's a similarity, even if we're not identical. But this was very different to the other ancient Middle Eastern cultures.

So ancient Egyptians, for example, they saw Pharaoh as the image of God because Pharaoh was God and fish. Like fish, the Babylonians, they saw humans as being kind of blended with divine blood.

So it was the earth mother goddess who mixed the clay into the flesh and the blood of another sort of God and said that God and man shall intermix completely in the clay.

And so Genesis 1 is completely different to that. In verse 27, the author is really stressing the point that all human beings are created in God's image.

He repeats the word created three times. Human beings have the highest position in the creative order. But we're not identical to God. And human beings represent both male and female.

[11 : 13] It doesn't mean all men. Nor does it mean all women. It's an idea of two distinct and different members with different roles and different functions.

But there's a single kind of essence or a single mankind. So verses 26 and 27 tell us that mankind's unique.

We're unique because, not because they're number one in creation, but because they reflect a glorious creator. Now, there's a recent BBC article that explores why humans still believe in what is called the soulmate myth.

Okay. So according to a survey done last year of 15,000 American adults, over half of them, like 60%, still believe in this soulmate concept.

Right. I wonder how many of us also still believe in this concept. So Korean dramas, like Crash Landing on You, movies, like Crazy Rich Agents, documentaries even, like Tinder Swindler.

[12:21] They all revolve around this amazing idea that there's one person out there who is perfect for you, right? Whether you have to go through the North Korean military or you have to go through Nazi motherland laws, you have to be united with your soulmate.

And why is it that we are so attracted to this idea of a soulmate? In the article, they interview a university professor.

And so he says it's because the soulmate myth that promises fulfillment. He says that it sells us the idea that the loneliness that we feel as humans is only temporary.

That one day, our prince or our princess will finally come and we'll live happily ever after. He or she will understand us on every level.

They'll protect us from all harm and they'll finally give meaning to our lives. And that's why humans for thousands and thousands of years still believe in the soulmate myth.

[13:38] But Genesis 1, it also weighs in on this myth, doesn't it? It tells us that we're created to be spiritually dependent beings. We're programmed in a way to reflect someone or something.

We're like mirrors. Mirrors can't make their own image. They can only reflect another image. So Genesis 1 tells us that we're created to crave almost a sense of worth from something that's outside of us.

If it's not God, we're still trying to reflect something else. And so that explains why we work so hard to diet and change our bodies to attract a soulmate who will understand us.

We slave away for hours at a career that gives us a feeling that we're doing something important in the world. We balance our books so that we can accumulate wealth to get a sense that we're actually worth something.

But verses 26 and 27 is so freeing, right? It tells us that our significance, our worth is not based on how others see us or even how we see ourselves.

[15:03] It's tied to someone who will never, ever let us down. We're made in the image and the likeness of the creator God.

Isn't that amazing? You have value not because of what you look like, how you perform, how much you have, but because God created you in his image.

Genesis 1.26 says that you matter, male or female, you matter, and you were created to reflect him. So things like the soulmate myth, things like our jobs, things like our bank account balance doesn't define who we are as people because we're made in the image of God.

And then as we read on, we come to verse 28. We see also that God's created us to have responsibility, some sort of responsibility over the creation.

[16:09] So God creates mankind, he blesses them, and then he speaks directly to them. And what does he say? He says he gives them two directives.

The first, to be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth. And then the second, to subdue and to rule over the earth. So let's look at the first one.

The first one is to be fruitful and to increase in number. There's this really amazing continuity with verse 27 as well, right?

So mankind is created in the image of God as male and female. And it's in this union of male and female that the gift of fertility and fruitfulness of human beings is given.

So creating new human beings is part of this bigger outworking of the creative love of God in us as humans.

[17:08] So by producing new life in this way, we glorify and we reflect God. We're continuing the creative activity of God just as we're meant to do as his image bearers.

And then secondly, God tells us to rule over animals. So the Hebrew word for rule means that humans are to manage and to care for them.

The slightly kind of, I guess, stronger word of subdue is to take possession of or to conquer. But that doesn't mean we exploit animals and creation for our own means, right?

Again, there's this underlying idea of being made in God's image. If we're made in God's image, we represent and we reflect his glory in the world. So that means any type of ruling or subduing that we do has to also reflect the nurture and the care and the love that the creator God has for his creation. So in Proverbs 12.10, it says, A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel. And now we also come to something quite interesting in verse 29.

[18:27] So we see another aspect of God, God as the provider. If you notice, so he gives seed bearing plants in verse 29 to humans, and then he gives green plants to animals for food.

So this kind of suggests that humans aren't only given the plants themselves for food, but they're also given the means by which more plants will be formed.

So human beings don't just have the responsibility to feed animals and other humans, but they also need to be responsible and manage the seeds to ensure that food's going to be produced for everyone in the future.

And God as provider here shows that God has made enough for everyone, for all human beings, for all creation.

And it's this situation that God describes as very good, exceedingly good, amazingly good. It's perfect in every detail, well ordered and complete.

[19:38] Towards the end of last year, some of you might know, there was a climate change conference, the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Scotland.

So the foreign minister for a very small island nation called Tuvalu in the South Pacific, he gave a speech standing knee deep in seawater.

And he said something along the lines of, we, as the people of Tuvalu are living the realities of climate change and sea level rises. We can't wait for speeches while the sea is rising around us all the time.

So Tuvalu is obviously not the only island country that's literally going underwater because of climate change. We see photographs all over the world, communities being forced to move from their hometowns because of droughts, lack of food, preventable sicknesses.

And then we reflect maybe more personally to how we relate to the environment closer to home.

And I'm the first to put my hand up and say I'm guilty of a lot of these things, right?

[20:50] The amount of resources that we waste when we buy something online that we don't actually need. The people we're directly taking advantage of when we buy the absolute cheapest clothing brands, ignoring why it's so cheap in the first place.

And the human and the environmental cost. After a big meal, how much food we leave uneaten. All of that destined for the rubbish bin. So verses 29 to 30 tell us that God has given mankind the privilege, and it's a privilege, to nurture and bring order to the earth.

And it tells us that God's ordered the world so that there would be enough for everyone. That there's equity and distribution and no one would be going without.

So it really convicts us to take a hard look at ourselves and our lifestyle choices right now. Whether we're actually using the privilege given to us in a way that reflects his image.

[22:17] Whether we can be proud to say that we're truly representing God in the way that we care for the earth and those in it.

And then finally, we make our way to the last day of creation. The seventh day. The way that our Bibles are currently divided into chapters isn't in the original text.

And we notice that the creation story, interestingly, doesn't stop with the creation of man. Right? Mankind might be the pinnacle of the created beings, but it's not the conclusion.

The last word is the divine rest at the end. So let's look at Genesis 2, 2-3.

It's on this seventh day that God had finished the work he'd been doing and then rested from his work. Now, God didn't rest because he was tired.

[23:25] The rest here is similar to the rest we feel after a long day's work. Right? When we finally pull the car into the driveway, get out, walk through the front door, and put our feet up on the couch.

There's no more work to be done. Everything's complete. And we see in verse 2 that there's not really any mention of the word Sabbath here.

Right? At least not in the sense understood by the Israelites. Where the nation of Israel would rest on the seventh day of their week. And Genesis 1 takes place before the fourth commandment in

Exodus 20, keeping the Sabbath, is given to the Israelites.

But the foundation for that fourth commandment is built into God's creation. God's people were to rest, just as he rested.

And as we read on in verse 3, we see that God really gives this act of resting a special significance. This seventh day is the only day that God actually blesses.

[24 : 42] And then he makes it holy. Right? He sets it apart and makes it unique. And the author of Genesis shows us just how unique it is. It's not like the other six days.

There's no introduction. There's no, then God said. There's also no conclusion. There's no, and then there was evening, and then there was morning, and that was the third day of the fourth day. And unlike the other days, the number seven is, or the seventh day is repeated five times. So three times a seventh, and twice a fifth.

So the author's telling us that resting is really, really important. And one of the last things we notice about this is that mankind's first full day on earth, after being created in verse 26, is not spent working.

It's not spent ruling or subduing the animals. But on their very first day of existence, they spend that time worshipping and enjoying God.

[25 : 51] Right? So the conclusion of creation, the seventh day, is really man as worshipper. At the very end, in fellowship with the creator God, the creator beings, the world, the sun, the animals, mankind, rests and enjoys the perfect and complete work of creation with the creator.

And this truth isn't just reserved for God's people. That's the beauty of Genesis, right? Genesis describes how the universe is ordered in a way that requires rest.

We all need rest, whether or not we acknowledge it. So almost 10 years ago, a bright, talented, 21-year-old summer intern, he made headlines around the financial world.

He had competed with 1,500 other candidates to get one of only two places in the investment banking division of the Bank of America's London office.

So he was nearing the end of his seven-week internship. And I'm sure as some of you guys who have done internships are aware, you really, really want to impress your employers to get that grad offer, right?

[27 : 13] And so he was the same. He was keen to impress until the very end. So he worked three nights in a row. So over a 72-hour period, he would go back from his office to his flat at 5 o'clock in the morning, shower briefly, then return to his desk.

So in banking circles, this is called the magic roundabout, because the taxi driver would sometimes wait outside the apartment while the intern or the grad takes a shower, puts on a fresh shirt, comes back out to do it all over again.

And then on one day, this summer intern, he never came out of the shower. So it seemed that the lack of sleep had caused a seizure and probably led to his drowning as he became unconscious in the shower.

So even though we might not have experienced that magic roundabout life in corporate finance, I'm sure that many of us identify with the pressures of workaholism, right?

We pull all-nighters to get out a paper. We engage in full-time study and then have a part-time job on the side. When we get our full-time job, we have a part-time side hustle.

[28 : 43] There are emails to reply, people to see, parties to host. And we're always just so exhausted, right? Always just on the verge of burning out.

And we always, always say yes to everything. Because we're afraid of what saying no to people means about who we are and our limitations and our weaknesses.

And sometimes we're just too prideful to admit that we don't always have it together and we can't be everything to everyone.

But the seventh day of creation reminds us that human life is more than just ruling and being good stewards of our gifts.

It nudges us and gives us space to think about the overwork that we do. What does this tell us about ourselves?

[29 : 45] What does this tell us about where we locate our identities and our sense of self-worth? The seventh day reminds us that we're programmed to be finite creatures and we just can't pretend otherwise.

So there are natural limits to our energies that we ourselves didn't choose.

And to honor those limits is to honor the one who put those limits in place. It reminds us that the very act of resting is a spiritual act.

It's blessed, it's set apart, and it's good because our creator God also rested. So finally, where do you find your rest?

Why is it that we long and we yearn for rest and yet we never truly find it? Throughout all of human history, God's rest has been an invitation to his people to share in his fellowship, to rest in his presence and to enjoy his love.

[31 : 10] But as we soon find out in Genesis 3, our sin breaks that fellowship. We see in Deuteronomy 5 that rest for the nation of Israel meant being freed from Egyptian slavery.

And after they're freed, they roam the wilderness after leaving Egypt. And then rest takes on the meaning of being able to enter the promised land of Canaan.

But the invitation to enter God's rest, his true rest, still remains for us. And this Sabbath rest points to Christ, to Jesus, as our greatest rest.

And at the cross, where everything is completed, where it is finished, we can turn away from ourselves. And as the author of Hebrews says in chapter 4, we can enter God's rest through Jesus, the one who offers true rest for our souls.

In Colossians chapter 1, it says Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. He's the perfect image of God.

[32 : 22] He's the perfect image bearer of God. And as we rest in the work of Christ on the cross, fully accepting his grace for us, instead of trying to work through our own efforts, his righteousness becomes our own.

We're saved to become the people we were created and designed to be, right? The true image bearers that we ourselves could never, ever be.

Only he can satisfy our deep longings for a soulmate and for meaning and for significance outside of ourselves.

And as we rest in the work of Christ on the cross, as we dwell in his presence, and as we're changed by his Holy Spirit in us, we become more like him.

We become the nurturers, the healers, the restorers, and the compassionate rulers of the environment that God created us to be.

[33 : 30] We become the new humanity that God intended, where God's image is being restored, and we can reflect him in all of his fullness and all of his glory.

Jesus Christ is the answer. And as St. Augustine famously wrote in his book, Confessions, Let's pray.

Father Lord, thank you for creating the heavens and the earth and everything in it. Thank you for creating us in your image and in your likeness.

And as we sing now about how awesome you are and how majestic your name is in all the earth, would your spirit just help us to become more like your son, so that we can bear your image on this earth as you intended, and so that we might see your kingdom come, and would your will please be done through us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.