

What it means to be Human

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[0 : 00] In a minute we're going to be reading from Genesis chapter 1, so you might like to have that turned open.!

And what struck me about when I saw that was that that was a headline.

For 99% of human history, that would not have been news that somebody thinks marriage is between a man and a woman. Even less would her view that 16 year olds should not be legally allowed to change their gender be a source of news.

But you'll be aware that attitudes to sex and gender are changing. You must have noticed. And you're given the impression that if you have views that are at all like Kate Forbes, then what you really need to do is to become more enlightened and to get with the programme.

So things are changing. And even if like Kate Forbes, you say, OK, other people in a democracy take different views, and I'm happy for them to do things their way as long as they let me do things my way.

[1 : 46] We do have to ask whether these views that are being spread out and I would say promoted today, are they making people freer or are they making people more confused?

Is what we're telling children and young people good advice? And I know there's a number of teachers dealing with this at the moment and concerned about what we're saying, what kids are being told.

So for four weeks we're going to cover these topics. If we don't cover things that you're dealing with at work or that your kids are dealing with at school, can you please email us and let us know what your questions are so that we can answer them at some point.

But before we launch in, I suppose what I want to say is that we need to approach this with the right spirit.

Some of us over this topic, we feel defensive, don't we? Even right now, you feel a bit wound up about what people are saying.

[3 : 02] But as Christians, what we want to do is we want to love people. Loving people doesn't mean you always agree with everything they say, but even where you disagree, you love the person.

And more than that, I think as gospel people, what we need to, what we really want to do is we want to hear, what is the heart cry behind the changes that are happening?

What are people crying out for that's making them want to make these changes? And I would say there's two things that we should be hearing.

The first thing is people around us are not sure who they are. They're not sure who they are. And you can see that heart cry in the things that are being said about identity.

And the second thing people are crying out for is they want to feel affirmed and valued for who they are. And folk aren't feeling that.

[4 : 11] And as Christians, we want to get to the heart cry, don't we? Not just answer the surface issues. But if we strip this right back, the first and fundamental issue is what does it mean to be human?

Caroline's going to read for us from Genesis chapter one. It's Elaine. Okay. First reading is Genesis chapter one, 25 to 31.

That's page three. God made the wild animals according to their kinds. The livestock according to their kinds.

And all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures

that move along the ground.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number.

[6 : 00] Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Then God said, I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth, and every tree that has fruit with seed in it.

They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth, and all the birds of the air, and all the creatures that move on the ground, everything that has the breath of life in it, I give green plant for food.

And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

Amen. What does it mean to be human? First of all, to be human means to be created by God. We do not make ourselves. We are created. Who am I? You are part of a universe that has been designed.

[7 : 13] You can see the order. There is a mind behind the world in which you live. There is a God that designed it. And we saw in that reading that human beings are the high point of what God has made.

When you read the account of creation, God did this, first day, second day, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And then we get to the creation of human beings, and there is a pause.

This is a significant moment. There is a dramatic pause. God has a little chat with himself. And up until now, everything God has made, it says it was good, it was good, it was good.

The whole creation shows God's goodness. But when human beings are made, God steps back and says, now it is very good.

It is very good. It's like an artist finishing off a masterpiece. Human beings are the high point of all that God has made. Now, the other animals, the fish, the land animals, the birds, they are made according to their kinds.

[8 : 32] But human beings are made in the image of God. That means you and me, we are not just very advanced, very sophisticated animals, as a mere evolution would suggest.

We just evolved a little bit further. No. We are different. They are made according to their kinds. We are made in the image of God. We are different.

We are qualitatively different from the animals. And image. If you think image is like a photo. If you were to see a photo of me, that would not be me.

But you would see the shape of me. You would see quite a lot of what I was like. Maybe you'd be able to see beyond the image, behind the eyes. Hopefully not. Of what I was.

And if you want to get a sense of God, all you need to do is look around at the world. You can stand on the top of a mountain range.

[9 : 40] Or you can see the intricacy and the beauty of God's creation. The colour and the little animals. And these things give us a sense of God.

His glory, his power, his creative genius. But it's only human beings that make God visible on the earth. If you want to see what God is like, you look at people.

Human beings are made in the image of God. I'm not going to delve into exactly what the image is and isn't. But if we moved into chapter 2, we would see that though human beings are the climax of God's creation, that's not the end of the story.

The end of the story is what? There is a seventh day. It doesn't say God made human beings on the sixth day and then job done.

He stopped. It says on the seventh day, God rested. Why is that part of the creation story? Because there's an end point to creation.

[10 : 55] There's a purpose to creation. And that is that the whole thing will relate to God. So as human beings, as we try and live out God's image, as we perform the task he has given us of bringing the earth to its full potential, the seventh day shows us that we do that looking up to God.

We do that as worshippers of God. You and I were made to reach out to something higher than ourselves. We do that in relationship with God. We do that in relationship with God. And we do that looking for direction from God.

This is what, as human beings, we were made for. So to be a human being is to be created by God. So the issue today is, how do I discover who I am?

Well, in the past, people looked outwards. And society told them, if you're this, well, this is a sort of role that you will perform. People looked outwards to discover who they are, who they were and who they should be.

But today, people look inwards. People look inside to discover who they're supposed to be. And the idea is that there's this real you, which you find by looking within.

[12:30] And then you have to live out the real you to the world. So you're often told, aren't you, you should be yourself. You look within to find the essence of who you are.

And then you live it out. Is that Elsa from Frozen? Hopefully this is Frozen 1. Do you know, Jayden, is that Frozen 1 or Frozen 2?

I needed Frozen 1. Imagine that's a picture of Elsa from Frozen 1. Let it go. What a great song. Not. Not.

She sings this. It's time to see what I can be, to test the limits and break free. No right, no wrong, no rule for me. I'm free. How is she free?

She's free when she stops listening to what other people say she should do or be. She's free when she defines herself and then lives it out.

[13:29] That's modern identity for you. Now, in terms of our subject of sexuality and gender, you can see this in transgenderism, can't you?

How do you discover your gender? Well, you don't look outward to your physical body. You look within for this sense of what you feel like, whether you feel like a male or a female.

And you decide by looking within what gender you are and then you live it out. Maybe even change your body to fit in with this inner sense of me.

As we move through, I want to try and show you why that really doesn't work. But the Bible says what Genesis 1 is telling us, if you want to know who you really are, if you really want to know that, you don't look outwards to what other people say.

You don't look inwards. You look upwards. Because you were designed by God. So if you want to know who you are and what you should be, then you need the Creator's wisdom.

[14:42] When you come to know God, it's like coming home. It's like coming to discover who you really, really are. So Genesis 1 points us in a different direction to how we discover who we are.

And who are you? You're a person made in the image of God. You have an incredible dignity as a human being.

The Bible says everybody, every human being is in the image of God. So every human being, in a sense, makes God visible.

And therefore, every human being is worthy of respect, no matter what they say, no matter what they have done. However much you disagree with them, and to be honest, however much you dislike them, they are still to be respected because they are in the image of God.

Every person, however they feel about themselves, bears the stamp of the King. That's who you are.

[15:56] So Genesis 1 points us in the direction of how we discover who we are. We look up, and it tells us who we are. We are in the image of God. Because this is about sexuality and gender, Johan has told me that I need to say too, that in order to reflect what it means to be in the image of God, it takes both male and female.

Genesis 1, verse 27. So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them.

As we look out at the world, we categorize people in so many different ways, don't we? Name, nationality, class, race, personality type.

Fundamentally, there is only one distinction that was there in the beginning, and that is gender. There is male, and there is female.

And in the account of creation in Genesis 1, God takes what is formless and shapeless and brings order to it. He sorts things out so that there is an order and a design to creation.

[17:21] And so much of that ordering is binary. There is earth and sky. There is land and sea.

There is darkness and light. There is night and day. There is male and female. In the beginning, God's design for gender is binary.

In Genesis 2, we get more detail of how God makes human beings. And he forms Adam from the dust of the earth. Adam, Adam, Adam.

The earth is D, A, M, A. His very name is related to the physical stuff of the earth from which he is made.

And then God breathes into him his spirit, and he becomes a living soul. So, people are both body and soul.

[18:22] We are both. There is not an inner us that is trapped inside a physical body. Human beings are constituted body and soul. So, Genesis 1 shows us how we discover who we are.

It shows us who we are. Because looking within doesn't... You know, you were made to look for something higher. So, if you just look within for who you are, it kind of leaves you empty.

And different things are filling that empty identity. One of them is sexuality. People say, oh, I am a bisexual man. Or I am a... I don't know.

I am a pansexual woman. Okay? But you are more than your sexuality. There's only so much you can see from looking within.

You are a human being made in the image of God. That's who you are. It's so much bigger. Now, we tend to think of freedom today as overcoming some of our limitations and restrictions.

[19:31] If I was to take a mobile phone. Thank you. Here we go. If you're not, this is Phil the mobile phone who wants to be free.

Phil the mobile phone. He's looked at other things and they seem to do so much more than he gets to do. He's particularly taken with the hammer. The hammer gets all that smashing action that Phil just doesn't seem to get anything of.

So Phil wants to see a nail and to smash it. What happens to Phil if he does that? Does he feel free?

No, he's completely shattered. Because Phil wasn't designed to hammer in nails. Phil was designed to waste Jackie's time.

And for messaging and communication. But he wasn't designed for hammering nails. If we use him for something he wasn't designed for, it doesn't go well.

[20:42] Human beings are not free when we try and exceed what we've been designed for. We flourish when we live according to God's design. Genesis 1.

But there's more to what it feels like to be human than that. Please turn over to Genesis chapter 3. Which I think Caroline is going to come and read to us.

Genesis chapter 3, verse 8. Genesis 3, starting at verse 8.!

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, Where are you?

He answered, I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. So I hid. And he said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?

[21:52] The man said, The woman you put here with me, She gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it. Then the Lord God said to the woman, What is this you have done?

The woman said, The serpent deceived me and I ate. So the Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

To the woman, he said, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing. With pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.

To Adam, he said, Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, You must not eat of it. Cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

[22:57] It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken.

For dust you are and to dust you will return. Adam named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all the living. Thank you.

So, I guess many of us know the story. There was one restriction. God made a whole good world bursting with his goodness. There was one tree from which they were not supposed to take.

And what Satan does is he gets in Adam and Eve's head and makes them want that very one thing that God has said they shouldn't have. And when they choose it, that's more than just a mistake that they made.

What they're doing there is they are choosing to live life, not at God's direction, but according to their own direction. They are choosing to be independent from God, even though God has made the world and given them their life.

[24 : 05] They think they would be free to live if this would be life, if they have this one thing. But, of course, it leads to death.

And that's a choice that you and I repeat ourselves. And when we do that, we overturn God's whole design for the world.

So, although God made us in his image and we still experience God's original goodness in the world, we also experience our fallenness.

First of all, our relationship with God is naturally broken. When Adam and Eve hear God coming, what do they do? What do they do? They hide because they feel shame now.

There's shame deep within. And there's guilt. And their relationship with each other is broken. Previously, they were open together.

[25 : 11] They were naked together. And that was cool. But now, you can't entirely trust each other. You know, you're both wanting your own way.

And their relationship with each other is broken. And importantly for this topic, do you notice how it comes out in Adam in particular? His relationship with himself is broken.

Adam used to be noble. He walked tall on the earth in the image of God. But now, when God comes, Adam is all sort of shifty. Shifty.

Adam, have you done what I said you shouldn't do? What does he do? Blames her, doesn't he? Blames Eve. It was her. And get this.

He even blames God. He says, the woman you gave me, she persuaded me. Would you Adam and Eve it? But when he was first presented with Eve, he was over the moon.

[26 : 20] But now, Adam can't even be straight with himself. He doesn't say, sorry, God, I shouldn't have done it. He goes into all this twisted stuff because he doesn't want to acknowledge what he's been.

So, Adam's relationship with himself is broken. Today, you and I, we're still in the image of God. You can still see that in people.

But the image is spoilt. We are like a masterpiece that somebody has scribbled all over. So, as human beings, we are capable of great achievements and great destruction.

Great love and great hurt. We have this ability to choose all sorts of things. But we're often stuck with the wrong desires.

Humanity is Rembrandt and humanity is Hitler. We are in the image of God, but the image is spoilt. And given that's the case, what happens now if we look within to find out who we are?

[27 : 37] What happens given that the image of God is spoilt? Here's a quote from a novel, The Goldfinch. The character says, how do we know what's right for us?

Every shrink, every career counsellor, every Disney princess knows the answer. Be yourself. Follow your heart. Follow your heart. Only here's what I really, really want someone to explain to me.

What if one happens to be possessed of a heart that can't be trusted? A heart one cannot help. An inability to want the right things.

And to some extent, that is us. So when you look within, it's not obvious who you are. When you look within, you find different desires and you find conflicting things.

Here's Buddy from The Incredibles. You always, always say be true to yourself, but you never say which part of yourself to be true to.

[28 : 51] Wise words. Let's hear them again. You always, always say be true to yourself, but you never say which part of yourself to be true to.

Exactly. So if you're looking within, which bit of yourself are you going to say is the real me? And which bit of yourself you're going to decide you're going to have to live out?

What happens is people look within themselves, they find different things, but they say, oh, well, I don't think that's the real me. I'm not sure that's the real me.

I'll tell you what, this thing that everybody is saying is good today, that must be the real me.

Because that's what people are saying is right today. So we make out we're self-defining, but funny

isn't it, how loads of people are going down the same road.

And what society is saying today, as I said, 99% of human history has said was not the way to go in terms of sexuality and gender. And in 50 years' time, people will be saying something different about what's being said today.

[30 : 09] And so the truth is, you don't know who you are without external guidance. You cannot find it just by looking within. Because we're fallen, there are many sad consequences to being human.

Physically, emotionally, sexually, the feeling that we're in the wrong body. We are not what we're meant to be.

Some of those things may be changed. Some of those things may be changed to come back to the original. Some of them may not. Some of them we have to live with.

But where there is a choice, what we should do is go with God's original good design, not with our fallenness. Because we know where that ends up, yeah?

So human beings are created. We are fallen. And then finally, because of time, really quickly, we are restored. Really.

[31 : 18] We are restored. To be a Christian is like coming home to start to be what you were made to be.

Jesus Christ was the first human being that came and lived on God's earth in the way we were supposed to. And through his death and resurrection, he is putting what has gone wrong right.

So here's a verse said to Christians. Christians, it says, put on the new self, which is being renewed. Do you see this phrase?

In the image of its creator. The image of God that you were made in has become spoiled. But when you come to Christ, what happens is you are being remade in that image.

And that begins in this life. And it finishes in the next life. What is the Christian hope?

[32 : 26] The Christian hope is not that you go to heaven when you die. That's not quite right, is it? That is not the Christian hope that you go to heaven when you die.

The Christian hope is that there will be a new heavens and a new earth on which we live in new resurrection bodies. The future is physical.

It's not just there's a soul that floats off to heaven and leaves the body behind. The Christian hope is that you will live in bodies and human beings will rule the new earth as we were meant to rule this earth.

The presence of God will come down. Heaven will come down to earth. It will renew it. And we will live and we will rule the new earth as we fail to rule the old earth.

So we are created, fallen, restored. That's what the Bible says about people.

[33 : 33] This is a very emotional topic, isn't it? And I know there are many people with very real struggles. And I think what tends to happen is that we're often swayed by really powerful personal stories that we hear.

We know people have real challenges in this area and we hear their story. And that makes people think, oh, well, well, then this is the way to go.

But I think we have to step back because even those stories are being told through a lens of today's identity. And the Bible, I think, is telling us a better story.

An identity that's true and an identity that actually works. We are created. We are fallen.

And we can be restored in Christ. That's what it means to be human. And that's God's plan for people.