I am made in God's image

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Preacher: James Ross

[0:00] Amen. There are some questions that Genesis 1 and 2 helps us to answer to do with our identity. Who am I and why am I here are questions of massive importance. One of my favorite movie characters is Jason Bourne. When he is first introduced on the screen, he is floating in the sea. He's rescued and it turns out he doesn't know who he is. He doesn't know why he's there.

He doesn't know what he's capable of. It turns out he's this super skilled secret agent, special agent kind of guy, but he doesn't know it. He doesn't know who he is or what his purpose is.
It makes for great entertainment as the series develops. But to not have a sense of who we are is no joke. Amnesia must be a terribly frustrating or frightening thing to lose your memory, to lose a sense of self, to have no idea who I am, who my family is, what am I here for. It's a terrible thing. In our modern day identity crisis, many people would recognize that it's the case that we know more than ever in one sense about ourselves in terms of biology and chemistry and psychology.
But that doesn't lead us towards satisfying answers about who are we as people. It doesn't always help us to answer the question, what is the meaning of life? So knowledge and technology advances, but those questions still haunt us. And one of the great blessings that we have as Christian people and one of the great gifts that God has given us in the Bible are that we can know who we are and we can know why we are here. So that's what we're going to focus on today, our identity and this reality that we are made in God's image. And because that's true and because the Bible teaches, we are never going to be able to fully understand ourselves until we first know God our creator and we learn to see ourselves in relation to our God. So we get our sense of identity and our purpose from the one who has created us. The Bible tells us in so many ways that as humans we are unique. God is revealing his glory today throughout his universe and as people uniquely we are both spectators to that. We get to see God's glory, but we are also actors in that because we bear God's image. So there is something, some semblance of glory in us also as image bearers. So we're going to consider what it means to be made in God's image. We're going to think about the reality as we find it here. We're going to think about the rejection that we find in Genesis 3 and then we're going to think about restoration. Probably spending most of our time on the reality that we are made in the image of God. So Genesis 1, we discover that human beings were created on day 6 by God. We were created and from the beginning it becomes clear that as people we are dependent on God for our life, for our food, for our abilities, so many things. And we are also accountable to God. That it becomes clear that God is in charge as creator, that he sets the agenda. So as we begin to read the Bible, we read as those who have not been self-made and we are not the products of chance or chaos, but we have been designed, we've been given life by God, our creator. We've been knit together in our mother's room, to use the language of Psalm 139. So let's think about this image that speaks to us about identity that we find in verse 26 and 27 of Genesis 1. Then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. Now huge amounts have been written about this, entire books have been written about this. I want us to notice four basic realities that we can see from Genesis 1 and 2. The first reality is that in the image of God we have been given the responsibility to rule. Now you see that there in verse 26.
Let us make mankind in our image so that they may rule over the fish, the birds, the livestock, the wild animals. So God is the king, but he gives humans this high honor and dignity that we rule for God in this world. We act as stewards of creation. We care for living things and natural resources and our environment. God is the king, we are vice kings. We have this reality in the image of God that we rule for him. In ancient times, icons and statues were placed by kings around their kingdom to remind their people, this is the king who rules here. And the Bible makes plain that God intends that we are living icons. That we are giving testimony that God rules everywhere. And it becomes

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clear in
[6:06] Genesis 1 and 2 that God is king because God is the one who issues commands. Chapter 2, verse 16, the Lord God commanded the man, you are free to eat from any tree, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So we rule for God, but we also submit to God as people made in his image.

Another reality that's so important is that idea of reflecting God's glory. So when it says in verse 28, when God says to Adam and Eve, fill the earth and subdue it. What are we to fill the earth with? Well, the Bible talks about filling the earth with the glory of God. As Adam and Eve lived in the garden, as they reflected God's image, they were filling the garden with glory. Because mirrors, they're like mirrors reflecting the glory of God.
Adam was told, and Eve was to be part of this, in chapter 2, verse 15, to work the garden, to take care of the garden. That garden was to be filled with God's glory.
God's design was that that garden would be extended, that the glory of God might fill the whole earth. That our purpose as people is to reflect how glorious and good our God really is.
Again, to think about our dignity. It is people who are the highlight of God's creation. Not a sunrise. Not the stars that we're seeing as the sky is so clear. Not Mount Everest or some great natural place. It's us. Billions of people. Every life has incredible value and dignity.
[8:09] And think about that. Since we are image bearers designed to reflect God's glory, when people look at us, or when we look at other people, we should be learning something about our God.

And this is one reason why sin is such a big deal. Because that leads us to distort the image of God. When we lie, we are saying God is like this. When we are proud, we are saying God is like this. When we are rude, or when we cheat, we are robbing God of glory. So because we are called to fill the earth with his glory, it matters for our obedience. Here's the third reality, and it's a wonderful one as well.
In the image of God, we are made to relate. Relating. Just to go back to verse 26, again, a reminder of the fact that we are the high point of creation. This is the one point in the creation story where Father, Son, and Spirit get together and hold a divine council. Then God said, let us make mankind in our image. And one of the wonderful things about being made in God's image is that we are made for relationship. So chapter 2, verse 18, God, having created Adam, recognizes it's not good for the man to be alone. He needs the suitable helper. And Adam and Eve will relate to one another in a highly complex way. You know, other animals relate in very basic ways. If you, you know, hear dogs around the neighborhood, you'll hear barking of various kinds. They, I presume, are saying something to one another. But people relate in a far more complex way. And most wonderfully of all,
God relates to us in a special way. Notice again, what verse, chapter 1, verse 28, and chapter 2, verse 16, have in common. God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number. Chapter 2, verse 16, the Lord God commanded the man, you are free. God is speaking directly to Adam and Eve. As image bearers of God, we have this privilege that we are invited to know our God.
[10:48] We can enjoy relationship with our God. Here's the fourth reality that we can think about. It's that of resting. Chapter 2, and verse 2, by the seventh day, God had finished the work he'd been doing.

So on the seventh day, he rested and he blessed the day. Adam and Eve's first full day in the Garden of Eden was a day of resting, to enjoy God's world and to enjoy God himself. It's an invitation to joy and to worship. Ten commandments. Give us that. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, to remember our Creator, to remember our Savior. So God has given to us as image bearers this rhythm that includes rest. A day like today, that we can draw near and be in God's presence, our Creator and our Savior, that we can worship and enjoy him. So here is the reality that we discovered in Genesis 1 and 2. Who am I? I am someone who's made in God's image. I am the high point of God's creation. And why am I here? I am here to know God. I am here to trust God. I am here to serve God.
I am here to love and to enjoy God. And to understand that identity is a huge privilege and blessing. And it's one that has massive implications. Just thinking about some sort of contemporary ways that this connects. Think about issues of war and justice. As we see those terrible scenes, as we hear of injustice, we are called to recognize each person bears the image of God.

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So the unjust targeting and killing of civilians matters. It matters in God's eyes, and it should matter in our eyes because we're made in God's image. So it matters for war and justice.
[13:11] It also matters when we think about the emergence of artificial intelligence. Maybe this isn't something that you've thought much about. I'm very grateful to Simeon for helping me to think through some of these things. Did you know that in Tokyo, you can go to a Shinto temple and a robot priest called Mendar can preach a sermon for you? Can robots preach? Can ChatGBT deliver sermons?

COVID introduced the reality of care bots to churches. Can a care bot organize our pastoral care? Can it lead us into prayer? Can it lead us into prayer? These are issues that are beginning to be wrestled with. And there's complex technological issues. But one thing is clear, that it's only people made in the image of God who are able to worship in spirit and in truth, body and spirit. It's always true that human caregivers will always be needed. We weep and rejoice with fellow image bearers. Another issue that it touches upon that's still very much in the news is the whole gender issue, gender confusion. The Bible is really clear. God makes us male and female.
To think about what we were talking about last week, global mission. Why do we care about global mission? Because people are made in the image of God to know and to enjoy their God. So it's essential to our identity to see that we are made both by God and we are made for God. And without that, people can feel lost and hopeless. And there can be a real sense of confusion.
[15:10] Now let's move from there to Genesis chapter 3 and think about the rejection. There's our second point if you're following in the worksheet, is rejection. Defacing or spoiling the image of God.

Again, the protest group Just Stop Oil are often in the news. I think it was last year they entered an art gallery in the UK and they threw tins of soup at Vincent van Gogh's masterpiece called Sunflowers.
Now, for the sake of art lovers, it's good that that art could be restored and cared for. But it was defaced in that act of vandalism and protest. Genesis chapter 3 takes us to the entry of sin into the world. And when we think about man in the image of God, what we have in this fall into sin is that God's masterpiece, people made to mirror God's glory, that masterpiece has been damaged and defaced and spoiled. Let me read Genesis 3, 5 to 7. So this is the point where the serpent has come and he's tempting Eve. Adam is not on the scene at this present moment. For God knows, he says to the women, that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil. When the women saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened. They realized that they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.
Here's this dreadful moment in world history where sin comes into the world. Here is this moment where image bearers reject the idea of ruling for God. They want to say no to God in his word so that they might be God-like. Here is the moment where they fall into sin when people stop reflecting the glory of God because they're more concerned for their own glory. Here is the tragedy of people breaking relationship with God. And we see shame and fear and hiding.
Here is when Adam and Eve lose that joy of resting in God's place, in God's presence. They'll be sent out from the holy place due to sin. We call this the fall. That fall from that high place, the glory of God made in his image. This fall into sin impacts every part of our lives.
[18:17] Our reasoning is affected. Our love is affected. Our actions are affected. That the masterpiece has been spoiled and defaced by sin. That because of common grace we still see traces of beauty.

that people are still capable of kindness and truth and justice and love. But still it is true that there has been a real and a massive loss. That original knowledge of God. That original living with God in perfect relationship. That original living in holiness without sin.
that original perfect obedience to God now has all been lost. And this feeds into our current identity crisis. Because we have become separated from our creator, God. And that to deny God as Adam and Eve sought to do is to deny an essential part of our identity. We only know ourselves when we know ourselves in relationship to our creator, God. And so we find so many people searching desperately for an identity.
It was Augustine that said hundreds of years ago, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. And we can see that today. And maybe we can feel something of that in our own hearts.

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Well, thankfully, because God is gracious, that's not where the story ends. Because we also need to think about the truth of restoration.
[20:16] That Jesus Christ comes to restore believers to the image of God. Here is good news from the Bible. God has a plan to restore his image.

That his glory might indeed fill the earth. And that plan involves the sending of his son, Jesus. A couple of hugely significant verses to do with Jesus. Colossians 1 verse 15. Paul gives this testimony that the son is the image of the invisible God.
The author of Hebrews puts it this way, the son is the radiance of God's glory. The exact representation of his being.
To put simply, to see Jesus is to see God. When we read the gospels, we are reading of the son of God, the perfect image bearer who perfectly reflects God's glory.
He is the son of God who comes to establish his rule, to establish the kingdom of God. And he rules not for his own glory, but for his father's glory. To read the gospels is to meet Jesus who perfectly reflects the glory of God. His righteousness, his holiness, his goodness, his love.
[21:52] To read about Jesus is to read of the one who relates to his God perfectly. We were thinking about the praying life of Jesus last week.

He loved his father. He wanted to do his father's will. And Jesus is one who is able to rest, to trust, to enjoy life with his father. And he invites us into that rest also.
So Jesus is the perfect image bearer. He is the son of God. Jesus then goes to the cross. Where his physical body is defaced.
Where Jesus dies. But in his sacrifice, as our faith is in him, the guilt of our sin is removed.
We are washed whiter than snow. We become new creations in Christ Jesus. This gracious gift of salvation that comes to us by repenting of our sin and by faith and trust in Jesus as Lord.
[23:14] And then wonderfully, as we become one of God's people, and by God's grace, he begins to work in us.

He begins a renovation work in us. Perhaps you've watched a building project. You've overseen a project in your own home or a public space.
Think about an old family home. Perhaps it's fallen into disrepair. Used to home families for generations, but now it's unfit for purpose.
Well, as the builders come, and they spend months working away, as they engage in that renovation process, when it is complete, it becomes a home fit for purpose again.
It gives us a picture of what God wants to do and is doing in the hearts and lives of his people. God is at work in his people, renovating us, so that one day, God's image will be perfected in us again, either when we return to Christ or when Christ returns to the earth.
[24:31] Again, a couple of verses from Paul. Colossians 3, verse 10. As he speaks of putting off the old self, he says, because you've put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge, in the image of its creator.

Being made new in the image of God. Or Ephesians 4, verse 24. Again, the language of put off and then put on, put on the new self. Created to be like God.
In true righteousness and holiness. That's the work that God is working in us. Making us righteous. Making us holy. Until we are with Jesus and that work is complete.
In Christ, when our faith is in him, a day is coming when we will know and enjoy our God perfectly. When we will be perfectly righteous and holy. When we will again perfectly reflect the glory of God.
Today, if you're a Christian, God is in the business of renovating you. And that process will last a lifetime. But day by day, God's spirit is working to make us little by little, bit by bit, more like Jesus.
[25:52] So that we are able to bring glory to God until we go to be with him forever. This is our Christian privilege.

That we know who we are. And we know why we're here. Our society, and you know this as well as I do, is full of restless hearts. It may be here, over and over, be whoever you want to be, whatever you want to be, that you can reinvent yourself constantly.
That's exhausting. If you're here today, and you are exhausted from trying to figure out who you are and why you're here, there is good news.
There is good news in God's word. There's good news from God's son, the Lord Jesus. He says, come to me. Come to me, the perfect image of God, the one who laid down his life for you, and I will give you rest.

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Jesus would take our sin and pay the price in full. Jesus would restore us to life with God. Jesus would give us a new identity in Christ.
[27:01] Jesus would give you security for now and for eternity. Come to him. Trust him. And for those of us who are Christians already, let's not forget our privilege, that privilege of being an image bearer.

Let's not forget our calling, that we are called to spread the glory of God. inviting others into the joy and the rest that we have come to find for ourselves.
Let's pray together. Lord, our God, as we have just scratched the surface of what it means that we are made in your image, we want to thank you for the privilege of being able to relate to you, to know you, to enjoy your goodness and your love.
Thank you for sending us Jesus to show us the perfect image of God. Lord, he is our true role model.
And he is the one who saves us by his grace. He is the one who graciously is working in us to make us more and more like himself by the Spirit.
[28:26] Lord, we thank you for the great hope that we have that one day we'll be like Jesus and we'll see him as he is. Lord, may you give to your people real hope and dignity and honour and peace and rest in knowing that we are made in the image of God.

And for those here today who are not as yet Christians, may you use this teaching from your word that they too might know that privilege of knowing and enjoying their God through faith in Jesus.
And we pray it in his name. Amen. Now we're going to close.

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