

What does it mean to be made in God's image?

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[0:00] Perhaps you could turn with me now to the book of Genesis. If you're using a church Bible, it's on page 3. We're going to be asking the question this morning, what does it mean to be made in God's image?

And that takes us to the second part of day 6. So Genesis chapter 1 and at verse 26, Then God said, Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

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

Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky 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 in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground, everything that has the breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food.

[1:31] 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. This is God's word. And this takes us to some of the most fundamental teaching that we're going to find anywhere on what it means to be human.

It touches so many of our biggest questions about life and humanity. What does it mean to be a human? Are we, as a lamppost recently told me, just all sawdust?

It was life random, meaningless, and that's our best future. Are we just naked apes, which some of us grew up hearing?

We have evolved to survive and thrive, but we're just one among many of the creatures. Or it's what God says wonderfully true. Are we image bearers with profound glory and worth because of that?

[2:34] What defines our identity as people? How would you answer that?

It's become something of a modern battleground. When we think of all the questions down at the street level, but also that make their way up into sort of government legislation, are we defined by gender and sexuality?

Think about all the tensions around race and ethnicity. Even questions of, am I truly human when I have value to society only, or is there something more?

And over all the confusion, above all the competing voices, we come to a text like this. We come to Genesis 1, and it gets to the heart of things because this is God speaking to us.

And he says to each one of us, you are made by God, and you are made for God. As we think about the implications of this, we understand every person born and unborn is a little miracle of God, and that every life truly should matter.

And today, I think in every day, every generation, but in this day, we certainly need to hear the Bible's clear teaching on the nature and the value of human life.

[3:56] And so as we come to Genesis 1, so we're kind of jumping into the second part of day 6, and the message is remarkable. If this is something that's new to you, it might even seem shocking.

If we were to ask God himself, what is the highlight? What's the greatest thing in this universe that you have created? What's the center of your masterpiece?

God wouldn't point us to the galaxies. He wouldn't point us to the mountains. He wouldn't direct our attention to the great beasts.

He would say, you and I, we are the crown and the pinnacle of God's creation. And Genesis 1, and the way the days work themselves out, is intended to show us just that.

Days 1 to 6 reveal that we have a God, and he is eternal, and he is good, and he makes with order, and he makes with beauty. And do you know what else we know? We know that he makes the world just right for you and I to live in.

[5:05] Here is this wonderful environment for us to live and love and work, and to enjoy and to worship our God. And we're clued into the fact that there is something special and significant in this second half of day 6 with a series of firsts.

So right into our text, verse 26, then God said, let us make mankind. This is the first time we discover that God deliberates.

There is a decision within the Godhead. This becomes, as we get to our New Testament, an early clue that our God is Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Another clue that there is something remarkable going on in verse 28, God blessed them and said to them, this is the first time God speaks to something else that is living and establishes relationship with them.

And then it's only once male and female have been created that God can look at all he has made, verse 31, and declare it to be very good.

Now that there are people who display his image in the world, now that the masterpiece of creation is complete, the artist can stand back with the deepest sense of joy and satisfaction.

[6:27] It's a remarkable text. Our topic is vital. We're only going to be able to scratch the surface, but what we're going to do is we're going to think about what does it mean to be made in the image of God? And then really importantly, to begin to think about why does it matter?

So three ideas to do with what does it mean to be made in the image of God? The first is this, we are made to represent God. Just to hear, let's hear verse 27 again.

So God created mankind in his own image and the image of God he created, the male and female he created them. Why use the language of image? So let's just think really basically, of the truth, images are created to image someone.

Okay, we live in Edinburgh. Edinburgh is a city full of statues. You know, you can think of John Knox or you can think of David Hume or you can even think of Greyfriars Bobby. And all of those images are created to make us think of the person or indeed the dog and their qualities.

Genesis 1 is saying that God has now created eight billion living statues. Each one of us designed to display his glory so that as we look on one another, we are thinking or we are to think of God and his glory and his rule.

[7:53] That gets us to the idea behind image and likeness that the folks that first wrote and then heard Genesis 1 were familiar with.

They lived in a day when kings ruled over vast regions and what that king would do, he would set up a number of icons or statues in his empire as a way to say, I am the king and don't you forget it, you owe me honour and loyalty.

Back in 1979, the statue that's up on the screen was discovered by a farmer in Syria. It's the Tel Fekiria statue and what's interesting, so it's a statue of an Assyrian king and what's interesting is that the inscription on the back in both Assyrian and Aramaic contains the word for image and likeness.

So this is a familiar idea. Back in Egypt, so God's people Israel, they had been slaves and in Egypt, they were used to hearing Pharaoh talk about himself as the image of God.

And so when Genesis comes to be written, it takes this idea and it makes it true and living and applies it to God as the king and us being made in his image.

[9:12] And that means that you and I, we are those who are made to represent God in his world.

It's there in verse 28, be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over. It's the purpose of that language of be fruitful and multiply so that the glory of God would spread and fill the earth as his image bearers would spread and fill the earth.

This language is saying to us that by God's design, every single person, not just a king, not just the elite, but every person would have this royal role and dignity upon them.

Psalm 8, humanity is crowned with glory and with honor because we are appointed to represent God in his world, to reflect something of his glory in this world.

And it's wonderful that we don't need to create our own identity. As we read God's word, we discover we have a wonderful God-given purpose. Each and every day of our lives to live for him and for his glory.

[10:38] So we're made, first of all, to represent God. Secondly, we are made for relationship with God. So in English, we have a couple of expressions that remind us of this.

We say of someone, you're the spitting image of your father or your mother. Or we talk about someone being a chip off the old block.

And so we take family language, we take relationship language, and we say there is image and likeness there. And so Genesis 1, again, is revealing to us that in a general sense, every person is a child of God by nature of being created by God.

Now, we still need to be saved through faith in Jesus to become children of God through faith, but all of us are made, our original design is that we would know and enjoy relationship with God.

That's one of the greatest privileges of our life to discover that. What kind of relationship are we invited into? Well, first of all, it's a personal relationship.

[11:47] So remember back in verse 26, there's that, there's the moment where God deliberates and he says, let us make mankind. Here is the personal God creating people in his image for personal relationship.

We are created in a unique way for a unique relationship. Just to remind ourselves that that says to us, God isn't a distant God. God isn't unconcerned with us.

We're not just here randomly and by chance. We have this, we're made for a personal relationship with God. Secondly, we're made for a covenant relationship with God.

I don't know if you noticed that covenant language is right here in verse 28 because we're told God blessed them. That's covenant language. God blessed Adam and Eve, the first people.

Humanity was designed by God to flourish, to enjoy representing God on the earth and to enjoy life with God.

[12:57] We weren't made as slaves. Life under God is not drudgery. This is the way to freedom and joy in life to know our God.

And the creation story does this for us. It reveals, and we'll see this in future weeks, that we are made for relationships. We're made for relationships with other people.

Did you notice it's as the community of male and female that we image God? Marriage, family, friendship, community, church, society, these are all God's good idea.

We're made for relationship with the created world. We hear the instructions to rule over, to subdue. There is agriculture here.

There's care for creation. There's a relationship that we're supposed to have with the created world, and we'll think about that. But fundamentally, you and I are made for relationship with our creator God.

[14:05] So that we are most truly human when these relationships are right, and especially as our relationship with God is right. And we will see that when people break that relationship with God, everything else begins to fall apart.

That sin, as it comes into the world, has a fracturing effect on relationships. So we are made to represent God. We're made for relationship with God.

And thirdly, as we think about Genesis 1, what does it mean to be made in the image of God? It means we are made to live a righteous life. And here we need to think just for a moment about the role of an ambassador or an embassy.

I know some of you have to visit embassies for visas and passports and such things. But you think about an ambassador or a visa or an embassy, what are they doing? On the one hand, they speak and they represent a particular nation, a prime minister, a president.

They are to represent their values. It becomes, in a sense, also a little colony of home in a foreign country. And what Genesis 1 is saying to us is that as image bearers, God created us to live like Him and to rule like Him, to display His values on the earth, to make a paradise on the earth.

[15:30] God creates Eden as paradise, as we'll see. And the intention was that as people lived under God's rule, that paradise would spread, that the glory would fill the earth, that it needs us to live a righteous kind of a life.

So God gives the direction. You rule, you fill, you subdue. God's in charge. And when life is going well, people respond gladly and obediently.

And it's in that context that creation is described as very good. And the condition of the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve, was also very good.

They were created without sin. They were originally holy and righteous. And they were created then to do God's work in God's ways. not to abuse one another or the environment, not to exploit or to destroy, but to live in the world in such a way to reflect the care, the goodness, the just rightness of God as creator.

It's the natural question at this point becomes, why is the world so messed up and broken? Why is there so much damage to the environment? Why is there so much damage done to other image bearers?

[16:53] And we need to understand that that is not the way God designed us to be as image bearers. To go back to the analogy of a statue, if we are statues representing God's image and glory, then that statue has become cracked.

There are pieces missing and the paint is fading. Rico Tice memorably describes people as both the glory and the garbage of the universe.

Capacity for beauty and destruction almost at the same time. So for us it becomes really important if we are to truly understand what it means to be made in the image of God, there is a point where we need to understand that we are not the way we are supposed to be and we need to find where can a perfect image be found?

And to recognize that God in his kindness has given us one. There is one who has lived in this life and he has perfectly imaged God to us and his name is Jesus, the Son of God.

That's why Emily read for us from Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3, Jesus, the Son of God, he is the radiance of God's glory and the perfect representation of his being. Jesus is the perfect image bearer.

[18:11] And the story of the Bible in one hand becomes a story of God's great restoration and renewal process. That Jesus comes, the perfect image bearer and he comes to live the perfect life that we don't and to die in our place for our sins and to give us forgiveness and new life so that we might be restored and renewed and reshaped into his perfect image.

Colossians 3 verse 10. That process is ongoing, won't be complete until final glory. But by faith, when we trust in Jesus, we are being restored and one day we will be perfectly restored to God's original and good design.

So that's something of what it means to be made in the image of God. But we need to ask ourselves a really important question. Why does it matter? So what?

What's so significant about Genesis 1? Let's think about it for a moment personally. Take this as a chance to kind of pull back and get the big picture of who we are, to get a God's eye view on your life, your purpose and your destiny.

Because it's here in Genesis 1. We'll also take a few minutes to think what does this say to us culturally? How does Genesis 1 help us to think about the various isms that we have within society?

[19:42] What impact does it have on value of life questions, on environmental concerns? And we can use this text to help us to think about our mission as the church as well.

As we bring the good news of Jesus to people, how much can these themes help us? So again, there's loads that we could say, but we're going to talk about design.

We're going to talk about dignity. We're going to talk about direction. And we're going to talk about destiny. So let's think, first of all, about design. So like the rest of creation, we discover in Genesis 1 that as human beings, we are designed with goodness, with order, and with beauty.

we discover that God has made us and he has made our physical bodies. God has given us our biology. God has given us our gender.

Psalms 139, God knits us together. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. And we discover at root, you are designed by God and you are dear to God.

[20:48] not a product of chance, not haphazard. And that has some really important implications for some of the big questions that are going around in our day.

Perhaps we think about the issue of transgenderism. And we recognize biblically that it is wrong to say that we are free to destroy or to remake our bodies based on our own personal desires.

And we discover this essential basic truth that sex and gender belong together by God's good design. One of the ways that we can love people well is to speak the truth in love.

If you have any people who are wrestling with those and you want to talk about that, do come and speak to me afterwards. But it reminds us that at base our physical bodies matter to God, therefore they should matter to us.

They are given to us as a gift and so we should care for our bodies. You know, sleep, exercise, diet, those are all good things for us to think about. It's important for us to recognize that we have been created with that sexual differentiation of male and female in part to speak to the wonder of our God, unity and diversity.

[22:05] We've been created the way that we have to allow for the be fruitful and multiply to take place. So we have been made by God's good design and we should give thanks and we should protect that reality.

Related to that, secondly, to be made in the image of God is to give us fundamental dignity. I think that's one of the radical teachings of Genesis 1 and this is, so remember, so the people had been slaves for over 400 years.

Their families had been slaves. No value, no dignity. Only the king really counted and here is God speaking into that and saying, listen, every single life matters.

Every single one of us, every single person on our planet is made in God's image, carefully fashioned. Everyone has value and dignity to borrow from C.S. Lewis.

You will never, ever look at a mere mortal. And I think most people in our society recognize this, but here's something that's really important.

[23:17] That people, according to God, are made in His image is the only solid foundation for saying that those isms are wrong, that we react against.

Racism, sexism, tribalism. We can only say those are objectively wrong if we accept that God has made us and God says that everybody matters.

If it's just what society thinks, on any given day or generation, we find ourselves on profoundly shaky ground. Think about what happened in Germany in the 1930s and 40s.

Why can we say that the Nazi movement was evil? Why can we say that it was profoundly evil to destroy Jews and gypsies and people with disabilities?

It's because of this objective truth from God that we are made in the image of God. Why can we say that abortion is wrong, that assisted dying is wrong?

[24:34] Because we have this objective truth that comes from God Himself that says, I create life and every person is an image bearer and life has worth that must be protected.

Think about the storyline of the Bible. We have the eternal Son of God becoming an embryo in the womb of Mary.

There's the value of human life, that God became one of us in order to save us. Another way being made in the image of God matters is to do with direction.

How are we supposed to live in this world? How are we to handle our responsibility of caring for this world? And again, Genesis 1 sets some principles to give us direction.

And it takes time and care to think about how we work out these principles, but we remember that principle that we are to care for the world like God. We are not masters here, we are not the kings and queens, God is the true king and we serve under him.

[25:49] And we are called as people to practice good stewardship. So that requires care and attention over a whole range of ethical choices.

And I think again it's really good that we're much more aware now than perhaps we used to be of some of those ethical choices. You know, how we shop, how we eat, how we spend, how we save. They impact our environment, the impact on the lives of others.

So we need to give attention. Recycling, reducing waste, concern for habitat loss. Those are things that should concern us as Christians.

And it should concern us too to think of the social impact of how we live in the world day to day. What do my choices, big and small, mean for the welfare of other people made in the image of God?

How do my actions and my choices help to care for the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, who are also made in the image of God?

[26:56] So we're to care for the world like God, but secondly, we are placed in communities to reflect God. And again, I don't know how much you have thought about that, but again, by God's design, we are placed where we are in our circles in order that something of God's glory and goodness and kindness and care and truth and justice would be known to the people in the rest of that circle.

Life in our home and our family, where we go to school or work or university, the neighborhood that we live in, the church that we are placed in, become places in which to show something of God's love and justice and kindness to the people around us.

We're not just a bunch of individuals. We are created in communities so that people might look at us and see something of God in us.

Think about that as we are confronted tomorrow with the difficult calling or as we think about those tough family relationships that we have and maybe the awkward flatmate but also to think about our life as a church as we look to welcome people in, as we want to break down barriers.

The fact that we are made in the image of God and that everyone is made in the image of God can set a direction for how we live day to day. Here's the fourth and final thing for us to think about this morning, why it matters to be made in the image of God.

[28:49] It speaks to our destiny. Now if our operating principle is that we come from nothing and we're made by no one and we have to try and create our own identity and figure out how life works and in the end there is nothing, I think we recognize that doesn't offer great hope, maybe it doesn't offer a solid motivation for wanting to make this world a better place.

And so we need to hear and to keep hearing God's better story, the true story of what it means that we are made as image bearers.

Now as the story progresses we discover Genesis 3, we discover the reality that as people we have fallen away from our God because of sin, life is not right now paradise on earth and we know this.

But we also have this wonderful reality that through the goodness and grace of our God, he is in the process of restoring fallen image bearers through his son the Lord Jesus.

that we recognize at a particular point in time in history the Lord Jesus came into this world to display perfectly the glory and love of God for us and the place where we see it most clearly is as he dies on the cross, his body is torn and beaten as he bears our sin and the wrath of God that we deserve, we are seeing God's commitment to renew and to restore image bearers.

[30:33] And when we place our faith in Jesus, we are united to him and then God sets to work at restoring and renewing that image that his spirit comes to live within us, to begin that process that will be complete one day.

But we can say the moment that we trust in Jesus, if you trust in Jesus today, you become a new creation, that God's spirit comes to live in your heart, so now all of a sudden, you're more able to represent God in his world.

Not perfectly, but God is working in us. And now we begin to enjoy a relationship with God that we never had before.

We call him our father. He speaks in the Bible, we speak in prayer, we enjoy his love. And the spirit works in us to make us more and more righteous. So it does become true that people can look at us and see something of God and his character.

And one day there is the promise that Jesus will come back. And this world that seems so fallen and broken to snow, it will be restored.

[31:51] And that for those who trust in Jesus, we will be with Jesus, and we will be made like Jesus for all of eternity.

And so the answer to the questions about human image, about human identity, they find their most basic answers here in being made by God, being made for God, and being made for life with God. God. And that starts by trusting in Jesus, the perfect image of our God. God.