

Men, women & creation

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Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0 : 00] If you didn't hear any of that, you're probably much better off. I share that because that film, which I went to see thinking is going to be a really fun film, very lighthearted, sends a real strong message to our society about the role of men and women.

It shows the battle between the sexes in our worlds. And the film highlights many interesting points, some which should be reflected on, I think, very seriously by culture, by the church.

For example, we do live in a patriarchal society. Throughout history, men have made women feel inferior and second class. And the film highlights how it can feel as a woman living in the shadow of men.

I also think the film shares some points, which as Christians who believe the Bible, we wouldn't be such a fan of. Like, I think it's actually quite anti-motherhood.

It also seems to celebrate individualism, saying we can all go it alone, and it's better to go it alone and be empowered to do so. We don't need each other.

[1 : 21] Clearly, the Barbie movie highlights some very important things on this subject that we're thinking today, about today. The role of men and women, male and female, in society.

And by the end of next Sunday, we hope to have come to a clear understanding together from the Bible about the place of men and women in our church family.

Next Sunday evening, by the way, it's worth saying, there will be a discussion time together. There will be Q&A;, opportunities for Q&A;.

So, if you've got comments and questions, do speak to me and the other elders, but do also come prepared for that next Sunday evening. And I think it's really important that we consider this together carefully, very aware that there's a number of new people in our church, have been so for the last year or so.

And we've not addressed this issue publicly. I've never spoken on this issue publicly since being here. And I just think it's really important that from time to time, we do consider it carefully about how this works out in church life.

[2 : 40] Many people have, Christians, have fallen out over these things. But we want to consider what God says very carefully together.

And as we do that, we understand from things like the Barbie movie, this can be very controversial in our society today.

We may be seen as rather outdated, but actually we believe that the Bible has a better story to tell regarding human beings in our world, regarding the place of men and women in our world.

And within the church, both men and women, boys and girls should thrive together to be the people that God has made us to be. And so that's my prayer that the next couple of Sundays will just help in that.

And so today we're taking very much a step back. We're looking at creation. We're looking at Genesis chapters 1 to 3. Not in lots of detail. We'd be here for hours if we did.

[3 : 41] But hopefully we will see what God says about this issue for us. I've got a few points to share with you. Firstly, human beings are unique.

You can read through Genesis 1 and it's absolutely incredible. I love reading it. I have this picture in my mind of this blank canvas and this sort of artistic explosion of all these things God is doing.

God is creating, appearing on the canvas. But of course it's not just all completely random stuff. There's a real sense of order to this.

It's not just God's random thoughts. He's doing it very carefully day by day in Genesis 1. And then comes the most special part of the work of creation that we read from verse 26.

The sixth day. Where God says this. 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.

[4 : 54] Over the livestock and all the wild animals. Over all the creatures that move along the grounds. This is the special part of the creation.

It's all special but particularly this point. It's like no other part of God's creation. As God has a chat with himself.

We see the Trinity here at work. And saying we are going to make human beings. And they're going to be made in our image.

In the image of God they will be made. They are the most unique part of my creation. The rest of the days are very different.

None of them I think. God speaks directly to a certain part of the creation. Like he doesn't speak to the sun and say this is your job. He just creates the sun.

[5 : 57] The light to govern the day. And it's very much clear what the role is without God speaking directly to it. But here he speaks directly to this part of his creation.

He speaks directly to the human beings. Verse 28. God blessed them and said to them be fruitful and increase in number etc. He speaks directly to this part of his creation.

The human beings. One commentator said this. Quite a long quote. But I think it's wonderful.

Though you could travel a hundred times the speed of light.

Past countless yellow orange stars to the edge of the galaxy. And swoop down the fiery glow located a few hundred light years below the plane of the Milky Way.

Though you could slow to examine the host of hot young luminous stars among the gas and dust.

Though you could observe close up the proto stars poised to burst forth in their dusty cocoons.

[7 : 05] Though you could witness a star's birth. In all your stellar journeys you would never see something equal to the birth and wonder of a human being.

For a tiny baby boy or girl is the apex of God's creation. That's what we're to think as we read verses 26 to 31.

Human beings are the apex, the climax of God's creation. They are the most unique part of what God is doing. The glorious splendor of a nighttime sky is nothing compared to the wonder of a human being who was made in God's image.

What a precious thing. And we see here that unlike the rest of God's creation, the creation is given specifically to them, isn't it?

Verse 29. Then God said, He gives his creation to the human beings.

[8 : 35] It's yours to live in. It's a gift from the creator to human beings. And unlike any other day of creation, on this day, God says it is very good.

He says it's good every day. But once humans are there. Verse 31. God saw all that he had made and it was very good. Because of the unique value that image bearers give to his creation.

Humans are a unique part of God's creation. Secondly, humans are equal to one another. They are equal. They are equal.

Verse 27. Let's read this. So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them.

There is no sense in those verses that man is above a woman or woman above a man. They are equal images.

[9 : 46] In the image of God, he created them. Not in the image of God, he created men and then he created women too. Male and female jointly created together in the image of God.

And being images of God is shown in various ways. We reflect the creator in different ways and it's spelled out to the human beings here.

Firstly, as we see that they are created to rule. God is revealed to us in the Bible. It was shown in that psalm that we read at the beginning of our service. It says that the mighty, great king reigning over all his creation, reigning over all the universe.

But he also gives a special task to human beings to rule as physical beings on the earth. So it's there, isn't it, in verse 28.

This is the sort of mission that he gives. God is the ultimate ruler, but we're like these vice regents.

[11 : 05] That's a bit like our prime minister. Keir Starmer has a deputy prime minister at the moment, David Lammy. And one of the roles of the deputy prime minister is that when Keir Starmer's away, he could stand in his place in parliament because Keir Starmer's not physically

there.

And that's the same for human beings. God is absolutely everywhere. But physically present to rule on this earth is human beings.

And he's given us that mandate to rule over his creation. And it's given to both male and female here, men and women.

We also show that we are images of God as he calls us to create. Be fruitful and increase in number, he says.

Our God is a creative God. We see that throughout the Genesis creation narrative. And human beings are also made to be creative too.

[12:13] We see creativeness in all sorts of ways. And one of the specific ways he says be creative is make more of yourselves. Create more human beings.

We're also created to subdue the earth. To look after it. To maintain it. To cultivate it. To discover what you can in this world that God has given to you.

Discover gold. Discover chocolate. Discover clay where you can make bowls and plates and things. Discover that you can get an orange and you can squeeze it and have orange juice.

Discover that with your voice you can sing and with materials on earth you can make musical instruments. Subdue the earth. Maintain it. Look after it.

Discover lots of things in it. Both male and female are given this task. Which reflect that they are images of their creator gods.

[13:18] And they are both together in this mission that he has called them to. And so things like misogyny.

Bringing down another sex is not a right thing in God's creation. It doesn't have a place in God's very good works that he has made.

Nowhere in this creation narrative are we told that the woman has less of a role to play in the mission of God for his creation. Nowhere are we told that they are made any less in the image of God.

Human beings are equal together. Thirdly, we also see that human beings are different from one another. We are equal but we also have difference.

So for example, the task to increase in number to have more human beings cannot be done if all human beings were male.

[14:24] Or female. I don't need to go into details. That's a very clear difference. We are equal but we have differences.

And the differences between human beings, male and female, are explained to us, I think, in chapter 2. What happens in Genesis 1 is a broad overview of God's creation.

And then in chapter 2 we zoom in on the creation of men and women. And so we will point out just a few things about chapter 2 together.

So first of all, in verse 18, no God keeps saying everything's good. Actually, there was something not good on day 6. Verse 18, the Lord God said it is not good for the man to be alone.

I will make a helper suitable for him. The man was alone. And God says that's not good.

[15:30] And so to try and solve this, in verses 19 to 20, there's this parade of animals which go past Adam. And he's asked to name them and see if there's a suitable helper for him.

Adam isn't alone in that sense. There's a whole world of creation, a whole world of living beings. And so he has this job to look at them and think of names.

So he thinks, well, that bird over there, that looks a bit like a chicken, doesn't it? And that thing with a trunk, that must be an elephant. And the tall-necked one, that's a giraffe, isn't it? That bouncing thing must be a kangaroo.

But there was none like him. There was none with a human body that walked and talked like he did. And so God does something about it for Adam. End of verse 20. But for Adam, no suitable help was found.

[16:31] So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. And while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man.

And he brought her to the man. Some say men and women are so different that men must be from Mars and women must be from Venus.

I think Genesis chapter 2 helps us to understand that that's not actually the case, is it? The Bible says that both are created from the earth. In fact, Adam from the dust of the earth. And women is created from the side of Adam. We are from the earth. And in fact, we're from each other. Whether we like it or not. That is how God has designed things for us. And of this act of creating the woman, Matthew Henry, the Bible commentator, says this. And I think this is wonderful. The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam. [17:41] Not made out of his head to rule over him. Nor out of his feet to be trampled on by him. But out of his side to be equal to him.

Under his arm to be protected and near his heart to be beloved. There's a wonderful equality shown as the woman is created from the sides of Adam.

But they are different too, aren't they? Verse 23. Adam says, this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

This is absolutely a human being. Unlike all those other animals that pass me by. But she's not a man. She shall be called woman, he says.

She was taken out of a man. They are the same. But they are different. And there are only two different sorts of human beings.

[18:47] Only a man and a woman. Only a male and a female. There is no suggestion here of any other genders going on.

As some in our culture today would say there can be. That doesn't appear to be there. It's not part of God's good design for the world here.

But then we realise something that could get us into tricky waters actually. In verse 18. It's all sounded really good so far.

Human beings are equal. There's some differences in there. It's all very clear. But then we spot a word beginning with H. Verse 18. The Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone.

I will make a helper suitable for him. End of verse 20. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. And then our heads prick up and think, helper?

[19:46] Hang on a minute. Helper's surely like a servant. Is a woman just a servant to a man? Is that what the Bible's saying? No.

Not if we're thinking about the word very carefully that's used here for helper. Don't think of just our own English words. The word for helper here has no sense of inferiority to it.

After all, it's a word that is used of God in the scriptures. But Psalm 33 verse 20 is one place. We wait in hope for the Lord.

He is our help. And our shield. If it can be said of God, who is absolutely not a servant to us, but is our creator and we live life under his rule, then there is no bad suggestion about this word.

A literal rendering of this word or this verse would be something like, Adam had someone like opposite to him.

[21:01] Someone who compliments him. And he compliments her. As we'll see next Sunday in terms of how men and women's roles in church life work out, we as a church hold to a complementarian view.

In other words, a view which holds to how God has designed things here. That both men and women are very much equal as human beings, but have different complementary roles to one another.

And that's seen in Genesis 2 and Genesis 3, and that's where we're heading. Human beings and the fool.

Adam was the one who was told by God about the trees in the garden. Chapter 2 verse 15.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Adam was given that instruction from the Lord.

[22:29] Adam was created first and has a responsibility to be the leader. of the relationship with the wife that he has made for him.

And so, no doubt, as Adam is taking his wife round the garden for a garden tour, no doubt he would have explained about the trees. You can eat of any of the trees.

They're beautiful and the fruit is delicious. But just bear in mind, not one tree over there. Do not touch it. Don't eat of it. Otherwise, we're going to die.

And so, chapter 3 comes. And the serpent comes into the garden. Verse 1. Now, the snake was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God made.

He said to the woman, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden? The devil's sort of twisting God's words here.

[23 : 46] Twisting the words that she has heard from her husband. No, that's not right. We can eat of the trees, but there's just one that we can't eat from.

What does verse 4 say? Let's read it. You will certainly not die, the snake said to the woman. For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened.

And you'll be like God, knowing good and evil. Suddenly making the tree rather attractive to eat from. And all the time that the snake is speaking to the woman, look who's there in verse 6.

When the woman 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. It seems Adam was there all the time. Adam who had heard God's very clear word about the trees.

[24 : 58] Who had the role of leading in that first human relationship. And he should have stepped in and said, no my love, let's go over here. But they both took and they both ate.

And very quickly shame comes upon them. They see they are naked. They see they are exposed before one another and before the Lord as he comes to speak to them.

And showing I think that more to us that the man is to take the lead here. God addresses the man first.

Verse 9. But the Lord God called to the man. Where are you? And instead of the man taking responsibility as the leader of the couple.

Actually very much different, isn't it? The man said, the woman you put here with me. She gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it. The man saying, it's not my fault, it's hers.

[26 : 05] And I think possibly all of us know what it's like to say that, don't we? Especially if we've got brothers or sisters. It's her fault. Not me. But both are very much held accountable to you.

For their actions by the Lord God who has made them. And so the consequences of the sin are laid out to them.

The result of death is absolutely the same for each one. But there are specifics laid out for both the man and the woman. Given their differences.

They're equal but different, remember. And so to the woman, he says in verse 16, I will make your pains in childbearing very severe. With painful labor, you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. Difference very clear. The man can't carry a child and give birth to them.

[27 : 10] But the woman can. And so in terms of her role in God's creation, well, things are going to be painful if they have children. Any time a birth of a child happens is a wonderful thing.

We see God's creative power at work. But it's also a sobering thing as we are reminded of the fall. And the disobedience of the first man and the first woman.

And their relationship is going to be interesting. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. Desire there. Desire for the woman to sort of rule over her husband.

I think that's what's being suggested here. In other words, they're going to sort of be competing for the leading in the relationship. Rather than being united together at times trying to tear one another apart.

And for the man, generally the one to work in the garden and provide for his family. Verse 17.

Cursed is the ground because of you that through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

[28 : 26] 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.

The consequences are hard and harsh labor in this creation that God has made for them. You will find it's going to get frustrating. Thorns and thistles will grow.

Slugs will come and eat your hard work. And in the end you'll return to the ground. It's not going to achieve for you very much at the end of the day. All you have to look forward to now is death.

Labor hard and then die. These are the very general roles, aren't they, for men and women.

Whether at work or in the home. Whether you have children or unable to.

Whatever happens, things are going to be hard. The washing will never seem to go away. No matter how much you think you're on top of it. You cook food.

[29 : 29] You spend hours cooking food and then it's gone in minutes. And then as we grow older we begin to find that our bodies begin to fail. And we know that we're going to end up back in the ground.

And so no wonder without God, without knowing our creator rightly, people wonder what is the point of living.

Without God people wonder if we can just sort of change, mess about with our maleness and femaleness. Without God people wonder whether it's good for a woman to bear a child.

Without God people wonder whether we can find ways not to bother working because we're going to die. So let's try and enjoy life. Without God people try and fight death and come up with ways that we can live longer.

But in the end, it catches up with us. Except that in God's good and beautiful design for our worlds and for men and women and boys and girls, that there is actually a great certain hope that can still be ours from our creator.

[30 : 46] And it's only possible because God created both men and women. And even though they had turned their backs on him, he was not done with them yet.

Verse 21 is a remarkable sign of his grace. He's about to banish them from the garden because of their sin. But it says, the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. They had made themselves some sort of leaves to cover themselves up. But God graciously provides for them through an animal. The first animal sacrifice.

Even though they're about to be banished by him from the garden. And then there's something even more remarkable in verse 15. In what he says to the snake.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman. And between your offspring and hers. And he will crush your heads. And you will strike his heel. That offspring could be one of Eve's children.

[32 : 00] She does have children. But it seems to be that this offspring refers to a singular offspring. Or a singular seed. And so we trace through the Bible.

And we wonder, is this person going to be the one to crush the serpent's heads? And we know how this comes about. Because we celebrate it every year.

At Christmas time. It comes about through a woman called Mary. From Nazareth. Who is told by God himself.

That she will conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit. And give birth to a son. And he will be named Jesus. Because he will save his people from their sins.

The words became flesh, we read. And made his dwelling among us. And so surely, as we read that, we see there is no greater dignity for men and women in this fallen world.

[33 : 02] Than the thought that their creator would come and be made flesh. Be made like them. Than the thought that Jesus himself, God himself, comes from the room of Mary to dwell in a human body.

What an amazing thing. And as he came, he came on a mission to crush Satan under his feet. And he has come to bring men and women, boys and girls, into his kingdom.

Back to know their creator God again. And there are all sorts of images for the kingdom that he is building. And we see a couple of them in Ephesians chapter 2.

Which is worth just going to for a few moments. Ephesians chapter 2.

And I'm going to read verse 14 and 15. For he, that is Jesus, himself is our peace.

[34 : 20] Who has made the two groups, those two groups are Jewish and Gentile people. He's made the two groups one. And has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

By setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was this. To create in himself one new humanity out of the two.

Thus making peace. In Jesus, as he brings together people from all over the world. Jewish and Gentile. He is making one new humanity. One new creation in himself.

And that new humanity we know today as the church. We're sitting amongst the church today.

People called to be the Lord's people. And there's another picture here of what the church is as well.

In verse 19. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers. But fellow citizens with God's people. And also members of his household. We become part of one new humanity in Jesus.

[35 : 25] We become part of a new household in Jesus. And in his wisdom he places us in local expressions of his household.

Local churches. And the way that he has designed this world carefully. And ordered it carefully. Is seen in his new creation in the church.

He brings order to it. And that includes in terms of the roles of men and women within the church. And neither of us can do it alone.

We all need one another. We all need the whole body of the Lord's people to be a local church. And we are going to see the differences in roles next week.

But as we close, let me take you to where the Lord Jesus commissions his church. At the end of Matthew's gospel. Matthew chapter 28.

[36 : 28] Matthew chapter 28.

Verse 18. Then Jesus came to them and said. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you. And surely I'm with you to the end of the age.

This is a mission that Jesus gives his people. A mission that any man, woman, girl or boy. Who is a follower of the Lord Jesus today.

Can play their part in. As together we come alongside one another. And help each other grow as disciples. As together we seek to reach out to others.

[37 : 40] And tell them about the hope that we have in the Lord Jesus. And all the while of doing this. We are conscious. We need Jesus' help. And he says. Don't worry.

I am with you always. Even to the very end of the age. Which makes us think this wasn't just for his 11 disciples at all. The time limit runs out when he returns.

The baton keeps getting passed on through his people. And in the book of Acts we see. Don't we. Whether you're male or female. If you're in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You receive his spirit. Who is helping us. In this commission. The church throughout history.

And throughout the world today. Doesn't agree precisely on the roles of men and women. Each church will take different positions. Churches we are friends with. Will take different positions.

[38 : 39] And sadly our culture divides over it. And people will hear a sermon like this. And say you're outdated. You're out of touch with the world today. But I think God makes things very clear in his words.

But it is important to recognize. As we have heard what we've heard today. And we'll hear what we hear next week. That the subject of men and women. In the church is not a salvation issue.

Our salvation depends entirely on us. Trusting in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we want to honor him. And we want to honor what his word says. About how we practice being a local church together.

And wherever we land on this subject. It is clear in Matthew 28. That we all have a role to play in Jesus' mission. And the only qualification we need.

Is that we're followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. We may get things wrong in it. We may misunderstand things in the word. We may misunderstand each other.

[39 : 47] But we can be united around the gospel. And the desire to make Jesus known. I think it's worth ending in this way. Who was it that brought you.

That influenced you in coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps it was a pastor in a church. But actually. Probably. Probably very much more likely for most of us.

It was. Some. Ordinary Christian. That we know. And we're close to in some way.

For me it was through the witness of. My mum. And through a Sunday school teacher. Who's now with the Lord. Called Nora. God uses ordinary men and women.

Boys and girls. To make himself known to others. And as we ourselves celebrate the 150th anniversary of this church.

[40 : 48] We're reminded it was set up through an ordinary lady. Called Elizabeth Gates. Who hasn't. Whose fame doesn't go much more beyond this church family does it.

By God's grace. He is using women. Men. Girls. Boys. To build his kingdom. And he will continue to do that. Until the very end of the age.

Let's just say a quick prayer. Father God. We thank you for what we see in your word. Amen.