

What are we?

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[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your great glory our supreme concern.

! Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Who are we? What are we?

Some years ago a Radio 2 lunchtime series was called What Makes Us Human? The quest for identity and understanding of who we are as humans is well known and we often engage in it. The genius of the plays of William Shakespeare is often described as his presentation of the human condition. In popular culture however, it took a whole film for Woody the cowboy to persuade Buzz Lightyear that he was a toy and not a space ranger.

As disciples of Jesus, we long to live in God's story. To take our place in all that God is doing.

[1 : 26] John Calvin opened his Institutes of Christian Religion with a sentence which includes this phrase. True and sound wisdom consists in two parts.

The knowledge of God and of ourselves. Real life. Real life. An accurate understanding of who we are and what we are must include the knowledge of God.

Real life. An accurate understanding of who we are must include a biblical godly understanding of what it is to be human.

If you don't know who you are. If you don't know who you are, you will get everything about life wrong. That is why God has spoken and written down for us Genesis 1 to give us such clear statements about who we are and what we are.

The revelation of what it is to be human in Genesis 1 must shape our thinking about ourselves, our life and what it is to be human.

[2 : 40] Our identity is not created by our own choices. Our identity is created by God in his word. And his spoken word defines who we are.

The good news is we are God's creation. We bear God's image. We receive God's blessing. We are more than we could ever have imagined.

And more than we could ever deserve. God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and the livestock and over the earth and all the creeping things and everything that creeps upon the earth.

You are not a mistake. You have never been a mistake. You are not a random collection of atoms that has somehow cohered out of all the possible arrangement of atoms in an unordered universe. You are purposefully created. You are purposefully created. In the creative act of God from which all humans derive, you were already in the heart of your father.

[4 : 06] God didn't know you only from the moment of your birth. God didn't know you only from the moment of your conception.

From the moment when God created humans, he knew all of us. It has become common for people to say that humans are no more than talking animals.

It's correct to say that we share a lot with other animals. We share 98% of our DNA with chimpanzees and 60% with bananas.

I think I got more of the banana than the chimpanzee. And so in many ways, we are very similar to other parts of creation. Yet alone, out of all the species of animals, God specifically speaks about creating humans.

You will have noticed, all the lights, the sun, the moon, the planets and all the stars are all lumped together. And God said, lights and stars and planets.

[5 : 18] And they all appeared. Of all the water creatures and all the birds of the air. That's what God said. Water creatures, birds. And all of them were lumped together in this one big category.

All the living creatures. All the different species that we see were all lumped together in the one category. The one creative work of God.

But God said, let us be humans. We are alike and unlike all the rest of creation.

The danger is, we get too full of ourselves. And we begin to think more of ourselves than we deserve. And so the first key thing in verse 26 is that we are created.

We didn't come first. In the beginning, there was no humans. In the beginning, there was God.

[6 : 29] God comes first. We have dignity and value as humans. But our dignity and our value is that of being created by God.

Made by him. We are made by God. Wonder how many of us, somewhere at home in a drawer, have a scrap of paper.

It's old. It's worn. It's maybe torn at the edges. It's gone a bit yellow because it's so old. On that paper, there are some faded crayon marks.

You could barely make out what the picture was. But it's the creation of one of our children. Or our grandchildren. And that scrap of paper is precious to us.

It's not precious because it's special paper. We don't take it out and go, ooh, look at the quality of the paper. It's not special to us because of the wonderful quality of the drawing.

[7 : 36] The act of creation and who made it gives it value. Human life, all human life is precious, immeasurably valuable because of who created it.

God made us. God made us. It doesn't matter whether you are young or old or rich or poor or famous or unknown.

You are precious and loved by God. We are not valued because of our abilities, our skills, our beauty, our stature. But because we are created by God.

God loves you. God loves you. God loves you. Before you do anything for him. Apart from your doing anything for him. You don't need to serve God for him to love you.

God loves you because he made you. God loves you. God loves you. the inevitable end of denying this biblical truth that all humans are created by God and therefore valuable and precious is the devaluing of human life the depersonalizing of other humans we sail to an island and we declare it to be unpopulated of any people so that we can claim it for king and country and then we say about murdering the natives every act of violence against a human is an attack on the creation of God every act of disrespect towards a human denies the reality of God's good creation every political decision to treat human life as disposable rejects the truth that all humans are created by God and all human life is valuable that you are created by God means you are of infinite value you don't need to do anything you are precious and wonderful yes you singular you have been created by God but that means all of you or if you don't like the Glaswegian how about the country in western that means y'all there is no one here today there is no one on the live stream there is no one who has not been created by our father we could all go out the door and go into the street and every single person we meet all human life is precious to us because it has been created by our father we care for the needs of humanity for food for shelter for health care for freedom from war and violence because all humans are precious and loved we plead with all humans to know the one God to come to Jesus who shares our humanity to follow Jesus and know God in him this is the ultimate good for any human to be a disciple of Jesus to come to the cross and be made new in him our shared creation by God fuels our mission to tell others and make God known to them we are created and then in verse 27 God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him male and female he created them we are created by God and God created all humans in his image for a long time philosophers and theologians have sought the image of God within the physical or the spiritual nature of a person they imported non-biblical Greek ideas of a soul or a disembodied spirit into their thinking but the text of Genesis and the whole of the Bible makes clear that humans are never at any time disembodied you cannot be a body without a spirit and you cannot be a spirit without a body if you are you're not a human a human is a human is a whole person a body and a spirit together

[12 : 40] so then what can we say about being the image of God here are two artifacts from the ancient world the rectangular one is the black obelisk of Shalmanasseh the third we see the king Shalmanasseh receiving tribute from Hezekiah the king of Judah so far as we know this is the oldest existing image of a Judean person and it's in London did you know the Bayou Tapestry is coming on tour next year to the British Museum in London that's where the outing is next year we're going to the British Museum we can see the black obelisk of Shalmanasseh the third the Rosetta

Stone and the Bayou Tapestry the carved stone this piece of carved stone with the image of the king on it represents the king and his triumph over his enemies in some sense that's what it is the king had it carved and sent to Judea to say look I'm the king and you're not this is my image the other one there the tall one is the the famous law code of Hammurabi just about the only reason for going to Paris you can go to the Louvre and see the law code of Hammurabi the image at the top is the enthroned king and he is extending his law code to all the nations in his empire and he had these steels carved and the law code written on it and copied out and sent round to all the different parts of the empire and set up so that people would know he was the king and this was his law code seeing the image was to see the representation of the king his he was present among you where his image was so when God wanted to represent his image before and within creation he didn't carve a piece of dead stone he made living humans when God wanted to represent his presence in all creation he sent y'all every human bearing the image of God to display and represent God in and before all creation this is not true of the sun and the moon and the stars it's not true of the mountains and the birds it's not true of the oceans and the sea creatures it is only humans who bear this image of God and represent God in and before all creation notice the text makes very clear it is not only male humans male and female equally bear the image of God there is no distinction between male and female here we are all one in bearing the image of God we are all one in Christ Jesus again self-importance is a great danger here we are the image of God look at us we are more important than any other part of God's creation but perhaps if we look closely at the verse we will see that being the image of God is not for our benefit it's not for our self-aggrandisement the image of the king in those two pieces of museum artifact does not benefit the black stone so no benefit to the pillar the image of the king on these things is for the benefit of others

who look at it and see the image of the king and know something of who the king is and how they are to live we are created the image of God for others to represent God in and before all creation not just human others all of creation others our created purpose is to make God known when we hear that 95% of the humans living in Edinburgh know nothing of our God nothing of any God to our shame one of the reasons for that is that we are not living as the image of God before them they do not see the representation of God's grace and patience and kindness and mercy in our lives our part in God's story is to live as his visual aid to be on display before everyone before everything that God might be seen and known in his image bearers by his work on the cross our Lord Jesus transforms our lives we will soon see in Genesis 3 how the image of God was marred in all humans what humans then covered over the cross reveals the image of God in humanity to serve all creation we are born again to be the image of God

God will grow his kingdom by sending his image all of us into the world to make him known and then God blessed them God said to them be fruitful and multiply fill the earth subdue it have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and every living thing that moves on the earth we hear that humans are blessed by God and immediately we think well that's good news for us aren't we special God has blessed us to our shame to our unending horror generations of humans have lived as though God made all things so that we could be blessed in abusing them it doesn't matter if the earth is polluted it doesn't matter if species become extinct it doesn't matter if climate change devastates the dry land and the seas so long as we are blessed so long as we are enriched and satisfied for our own benefit well actually it does matter because that's not why we were blessed if we look again at verse 28 and ask the question humans are blessed by God but who benefits from that who have we been blessed for the verbs subdue and dominion are misunderstood as human serving creation will run into chaos and decay unless there is someone controlling and guiding and serving and shaping the ongoing life of creation the forces within creation will tear it apart and so God blesses creation by blessing us to serve others to serve all creation

God who holds the whole world in his hands sends humans as his image blesses humans so that we can serve creation you may remember or may know that I was at one time a civil engineer this is quite shameful not being a civil engineer but this bit the motto of the institution of civil engineers reflects the core values of civil engineering which involve using knowledge and cleverness to direct nature's power for the benefit and convenience of humanity isn't that shameful a whole institution a whole profession dedicated to abusing creation for the benefit and blessing of humanity in contrast the blessing of God upon humans is so that we will use our human power for the benefit and

blessing of creation so that in our care all creation will flourish and will resound in the glory of God and so if you want to be blessed by God that's a good desire pray that God will bless you and bless us all but when God blesses us he does that so that we will serve others

God pours his blessing upon you so that you will serve creation by caring for it this is how we know that God has blessed us when we serve others when we serve creation as its stewards nurturing it to its greatest good we are created by God each human is precious and valuable we are the image of God each human is to represent God within and before all creation we are blessed by God blessed so that we can live to bless others this is who we are this is who God has made us to be we can grow into this only through

[23 : 10] Jesus and our fellowship with him only as we depend upon the cross only as we enter into the new life of the resurrection only as the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us and lives within us and renews us and transforms us but this is who we are made to be this is our desire to be humans like this and as we are humans like this all other humans and all the rest of creation is blessed by God being at work for them let's pray together father we we honour you we bless you that you have made us we could not make ourselves but you have made us we pray that you would humble us and hold us in your hand set us forth that seeing us all people and all creation might know your grace and your love use us for your glory and continue to transform us from human into human from glory into glory that we might serve you as you have made us we ask it in Jesus name

Amen Amen Thank you.