

The Image Of God

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[0 : 00] Alright, we're on the first page of the Bible in that Genesis 1 passage. A little behind the scenes. I was planning a sermon series on the book of Ruth whenever I'd be preaching here.

But the last time I preached it was on Genesis 1 and Bill Dunlop sat down next to me at a prayer service and just said, Why don't you just keep going? And far be it from me to not listen to Bill Dunlop.

So here we are continuing in Genesis 1. Thank you, Bill. In this evening's passage, we see God as creator, right?

And the pinnacle of his creation is coming. He is about to create humanity. You know, the pinnacle is not the foaming seas, it's not the snow-capped mountains, the infinitesimally small molecules that make up this world.

The crowning achievement is male and female created in the image of God. If God was an artist painting creation, humanity is his masterpiece.

[1 : 09] Now, quick question. I brought some slides with, and I don't need to put them up. They're good. Alright. We've got some...we can take that...we'll put that one up later. So I have some images to go. I have four points and four images to show you as we go through.

And our AV people, who know way more than I do, were able to put them into the slideshow at the last minute, because that's how I roll. And so it's much appreciated. But this image, the reason I'm doing that, this image of God as creator, and there's a photo and there's three paintings, and I hope to get across this idea of what it means to be made in the image of God and what's gone wrong and maybe give you some little things to hang these thoughts on and be able to remember them.

And fair warning, though, you know, all of a sudden I'm talking about paintings. I am not an artistic person. That's not...I don't have an artistic bone in my body. If I go to an art museum, I'm usually like, great job!

Looks like a bowl of fruit. You nailed it, right? But even a Neanderthal like me sometimes can get moved by a piece, and hopefully some of these images that we're going to show kind of cement these biblical truths for us.

Before we get to our outline and our passage, though, let me pray for the preaching of God's word. Father, we ask that you would open our eyes to see your glory.

[2 : 34] Father, would you illumine our hearts to the wonder of your purposes through the preaching of your word? We ask that it would be you who is speaking.

And we ask this in the name of the firstborn of all creation. Amen. All right, this passage is... The main part of it is about the image of God.

And so there's four points for our outline. First is the image created. Secondly, the image marred. Third, the image redeemed. And then lastly, the image restored.

We'll have to kind of go to other parts of the Bible for this. But the image created, the image marred, the image redeemed, and the image restored. The first thing, the image created. That's the longest point.

Got to lay the foundation here. A lot's been going on from verses 1 through 23. A lot of stuff has been created. But on the sixth day, verses 24 to 31, it slows down to show the importance of what is going on.

[3 : 35] This is the peak of Genesis 1. And God's created. He's created the galaxies of this world, and he's now filling this world. Verses 24 and 25, you know, living things are now filling the dry land after he had previously had living things fill the sea and the skies.

And then we get to God saying, in verse 26, he says, Let us. Quick aside in that. Some people take that. Why is God, there's one true God, and he's saying, let us.

Some people say it's a plural of majesty. You know, the royal we kind of that God's using to show his kingship. Other people say he's speaking to the heavenly court.

I tend to think that this is the first little hint towards what's going to come in fullness, that this one God is three in one. He says, let us make man in our image after our likeness.

You hear image and likeness, they kind of go together and somewhat synonymous to each other. And then in verse 27, there's this poetic way that describes God's creation of man.

[4 : 45] In your Bible, you might even see it. Everything's kind of like little lines, and it gets set off almost like it's poetry, right? Because there's this repetition of what God's doing. So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. You exist because God intended to create you.

You were in an accident that just happened to be here. The one true God created you because he intended to do that. And notice also, it's male and female together that are the image of God.

Men and women are both image bearers. And to fully bear the image of God, it takes men and women. You know, a lot of us fear that we're nothing, that nobody cares.

This text says no. God does. This is saying, if you could hop in a spaceship and zoom millions of light years through the galaxies and see stars collapsing and new ones kind of being formed and exploding in this cloudy dust, that would be nothing compared to the glory of a child being born.

[6 : 03] First image, please. If we can get that one up. This is a photograph of this group of men from the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike in 1968 in the United States, kind of right in the heart of the Civil Rights Movement.

It became one of the most important images in the Civil Rights Movement because the Civil Rights Leader, Martin Luther King Jr., he came to Memphis because of this strike.

And one week after this photo was taken, he was assassinated. And the reason that they're striking was because of the working conditions in the sanitation work that they did, a couple of black men who were working there died, and the company, the Memphis Sanitation Company, barely gave them any money to even cover the funeral expenses.

And so because of the mistreatment and inequality, they went on strike. And I don't know if you can see it, but the signs that they held, what does it say? I am a man.

I am a man. It's striking because all the things that they could have said, what they are, what's at the basis of it, where are they getting from? That's from Genesis 1, right?

[7 : 14] I am a man. It implies that should mean something about how I am treated. We're men. We're image bearers, every single one of us.

We're bearing God's image, and that has implication for how people get treated. We can take that one down for now. We'll come to the next one and the next point. You see, Genesis 1 is a foundational passage if you want to understand who you are.

You, every single one of you, have been created in the image of God. No matter what you think about yourself, no matter if you agree with that or disagree, no matter how high your self-esteem is or low, this is the truth that the Bible is saying.

You are the image of God. Ask somebody on the streets of Paris what it means to be human, you'll probably get a thousand different answers, but the Bible starts here.

To be human, the first thing it tells you is to be created in the image of God. Interestingly, other creation accounts, and at that time in the ancient Near East, this idea of the image, the icon of God, was used in various ways, but do you know what it was only ever applied to?

[8 : 22] Kings. Kings. Kings. Those would be the only ones who would say, these ones are the representation of, they would be the gods, right? But Genesis 1 subverts that, says, uh-uh, it's not only kings who bear the image of God, it is every single person.

Like, God has this idea that he's creating this kingdom of priests in his creation. There is an irreducible dignity to every human being because you bear the image of God.

And Christians should by no means be anti-science, but in saying that, we can be honest, science cannot tell you that you have dignity. It's not what it's there for, it's not what it does, right?

That you're worthy and you have value. No, it's only from the Bible, it's from faith, right? There's this atheist historian, unbeliever named Tom Holland, and he wrote this very important book recently called Dominion.

And amongst all the things that he argues, one of the chief things he says, the way that we have basic human rights, where does that all come from? He says, well, why do we care about humility and love and servant-heartedness and treating people, even if they're poor, no matter what they make, whether their skin color is different, where does that come from?

[9 : 43] He says, it comes from Christianity. That's the place where it comes from. And of course, Christians don't have a perfect track record by miles in upholding all that it means to treat other people like they bear the image of God.

But if you want to trace the rise of caring for the poor, orphanages being built, hospitals being built, the abolition of slavery, the goodness of humility, the power of forgiveness, loving your enemy, what we talked about this morning, it all comes from Christianity.

And it's interesting because in Western society, sometimes some of these things, we hold them as these self-evident truths, whereas Western society is actually living off of the capital of Christianity. And now as we're removing ourselves from that, we can see that the foundation is being shaken.

We don't know how to treat one another. We don't know what it is to be made in the image of God. Not every human society has always agreed that all people have equal dignity and value. Not all of them in the world right now. Aristotle, so wise, he said some people are born to be slaves.

[10 : 51] What does it mean to be created in the image of God and after his likeness? I'm going to spare us the history of interpretation of this and kind of cut to the chase.

To be made in the image of God is about who you are and what you do. Human beings are set apart because God says so within his creation and they're given a specific role within creation.

So look at verse 26. It says, Let us make man in our image after our likeness. Then what does it say? Let them have dominion over all the earth. Again, verse 27.

God created man, and then verse 28. What does it say? These are God's first words to man. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on earth.

What's going on here? Well, it's time to be in the image of God is to do the things that God does to represent him. Right? And he specifically defines what the image of God is.

[12 : 00] To have dominion? I don't know. I think if you ask the average person they hear that word it might make them feel a little bit uneasy because when you hear the words dominion and subdue, you're just like, that kind of sounds mean.

Like power that's being abused. But not in the kingdom of God. To have dominion, what is God doing? God is literally bringing the fruitfulness of creation out.

His dominion, his power is used for creative purposes. To bring order. To bring life. And so, to be created in the image of God is to reflect that out into the world.

Human beings, they're to be fruitful. Bringing the fruit of their whole selves into the world. The fruit of their bodies, the fruit of their minds, the creative capacities. Sometimes this gets referred to as the cultural mandate.

An image that can help us understand what it means to be created in the image of God is one that I've heard a few times from different theologians. It's one of an angled mirror. I don't know if anybody did this when you had, if you had kids and they'd be in the back seat.

[13 : 08] You know, they had to face the rear of the car and you're just like, what are they looking at? If they're sad, they need to see my face. And so, what we would do with our kids is you've got your rear view mirror but then we'd hang a little mirror for our kids too.

So, not only could they see their own face but it was angled so they could see us also. Right? This angled mirror, it kind of goes in two directions. And so, what does it mean to be created in the image of God to reflect Him?

It's this idea that humans are put there to reflect out into creation God's own work. What it means that He has dominion. Right?

His goodness, His love, His justice, His kindness, His creativity. It gets reflected as His representatives out into the world. Right? Caring for creation like He cares.

As His vice regents, as it were. But then it's an angled mirror also in that humanity is put in this specific place to then reflect and sum up the praises of creation to God.

[14 : 09] Almost as like a priest for all of creation. Summing up the praises of everything. And if that sounds kind of weird to you then, you know, I don't know, read the Psalms.

That's what's going on. Let everything that have breath praise the Lord. Right? Whether it's the great sea creatures or the mountains or the trees, humanity stands and sums up creation in worship to God.

So to be created in the image of God is to have dominion, to fill the earth, to subdue it. But that's representing God. His image into the world. Caring for these things.

But then also, summing up the praises in worship to God. Right? We stand out within creation. Let me apply this before moving on. First, remembering we're image bearers and treating others as image bearers.

It's really easy to talk about in a sermon. It's very hard to do in real life. Because you see, I don't know about you, but if I want to capture a sense of wonder and grandeur to God's creation, I drive out to the hills, to the highlands.

[15:16] You know? You go to the Isle of Lewis or something like that where God perfected everything. You know? And you go there and your breath is taken away and while those mountains and those trees are glorious, they don't bear the image of God.

People do. And people can be very hard to love, but they bear the image of God. And you know what I see going on, walking around all over Partick and Glasgow?

The image of God. That's a really good thing. Second application, we should be the first to recognize the dignity of people. Ourselves, in one another, and in our neighbors.

It's really easy. It's so easy. First thing you see is the faults and the sins and the failures of other people. But is that where the Bible starts in talking about humans? No.

It starts with their dignity and their worth. We train our minds to think that way when we look at other people. Third application, we need to champion saying no to demeaning and harming the image of God.

[16:22] Whether it's the unborn or the disabled, we don't see people through the lens of social utility. Right? They bear God's image. Whether it's women or other races, the poor, or whomever, we don't make demeaning jokes and participate in perpetuating feelings of superiority towards other people.

It's how we talk about other people. In James 3, when it's talking about the power of the tongue, in verse 9, it says, With our tongues we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made after the likeness of God.

It's saying these things don't hold together. It doesn't make sense. Alright, so that's the image created, but we all know things ain't the way they're supposed to be. Second thing is the image marred.

Do you know what the number one title for poems written by young poets from Generation Z is?

The number one title. Who am I? Who am I?

Kind of like a horror of our modern age is people don't know who they are. I don't want to sound like the finger wagging curmudgeon here, but I just want to point out that if a society takes God out of the equation and then you want to talk about the image of God, you've taken God out, what are you left with?

[17:42] You're just left with an image, right? An image turned in on itself. It's a dead end and people are always trying nowadays, they're trying to create this image to project out into this world, this one where I'm okay.

Right? We're all trying to project these images. A mirror that doesn't want to reflect God's goodness and his purposes out into the world, but wants to reflect out our own agenda.

Seek to grab for oneself. A mirror that doesn't want to reflect back praise to God, but praise just to ourselves. These angled mirrors get tilted in the wrong direction.

The image is marred because of sin. It's not in our passage, right? You're like, well, that's not until Genesis 3, right? But you have to bring it up when you're talking about the image of God. And this is why rather than mankind having dominion that brings forth beauty and fruitfulness of the world and culture, now, what has dominion?

Sin. That's what the Bible says. Sin has dominion. Instead of God's reign in his kingdom being the thing that's perfect in this world, a rival kingdom gets set up.

[18:52] A kingdom of darkness. A kingdom of Satan. The kingdom of man, right? It's like an antithesis to the kingdom of God. The way that he's supposed to rule and reign through humanity mediating it.

And the image of God doesn't go away just because of sin. Genesis 5, Genesis 9, it still says man is made in God's image, but it's marred. It's Francis Schaeffer.

He's used this phrase. He says, humans are like glorious ruins. And the answer to the question who am I, in order to answer that, you have to know where you came from.

You have to know what your purpose is in this world to be able to answer that question. Can we put the second image up that we got there? This is a self-portrait of Vincent van Gogh, or if you're Dutch or a pretentious art lover, Vincent van Gogh, or hugh, right?

So Vincent van Gogh, he painted a lot of self-portraits, but this one's interesting because it came, if you know anything about his life, the thing you probably know is that he went a little bit insane and he cut off his ear.

[20 : 01] He had this argument with his flatmate, another painter, Paul Gauguin, and after that, he had this fit of madness and he chopped his ear off, right?

And he was sent to a mental asylum. And in there, in the year that he was there, he painted 140 paintings, two of which were self-portraits with his bandaged ear.

Again, not an artist. I've never done it before. Has anybody here ever done a self-portrait? I think that would be a really interesting kind of task, you know, little project to do.

If you paint a self-portrait, do you leave that wrinkle? Do you kind of straighten the jawline a little bit? Rather than running from his shame, though, what's interesting about this is Vincent Van Gogh, he kind of captures it, right?

He paints himself with the bandage on. I wonder if we're this honest about ourselves. You can take that one down now. What image of yourself do you want to paint?

[21 : 05] Do you portray to the world? your beauty, your steely resolve, your intelligence? That portrait almost feels like an indictment on me that I'm like the first image bearer trying to cover up after sin enters into this world.

I can't be honest about the image that's really there. And there's still beauty in the image. People talk about that. It's worth millions of dollars, even with the bandage around his ears. A striking beauty.

But we have to be honest about what we've done to ourselves and what we've done to one another. And so we ask questions like who am I? And we attempt to answer it by projecting these different images into the world to try to find some sort of satisfaction.

And we conceal what is twisted and marred. It's like using concealer for the soul. But when we do this and we insist on doing this we hide what God actually wants to redeem.

God wants to redeem his image which leads to the third point. Humanity created in God's image dignity a role to play that image remains despite sin but it's twisted and marred.

[22 : 20] That the mirror isn't reflecting out the way it's supposed to. It's not reflecting up the way that it's supposed to. This brings us to the third point is the image redeemed. Alright, next one.

See, I don't even know a lot about art but I'm guessing everybody here knows this one, right? Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci. I was reading about this. Do you know that in 1911 the Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre?

They were building this glass case for it in order to keep it safe and the guy who helped to build that glass case he hid in a broom closet until everybody left and then he snuck out and stole the painting.

I think he was Italian and part of it was his protest. This shouldn't be in France this should be back in Italy and this was before CCTV and so for the Mona Lisa was missing for over two years and of course you know what would the museum officials want?

They want justice, right? The person who did this must pay but do you know what they want more than justice? What would they want more than the person paying for what they've done?

[23 : 33] They want the painting back, right? They finally did recover it and put it in the Louvre. Thanks Jonathan you can take that one down. They wanted their painting back. Why do I share that? Well it's because of this.

What the Bible tells us is that God is holy and because of that he's wholly committing to judging sin and overcoming the serpent who's stolen his masterpiece.

Right? He opposes dominion that brings death instead of life. But he doesn't simply want justice for the marring of his image. What does God want? What does the great master painter, the creator want?

He wants his image back. He wants it redeemed. He wants his treasure and his masterpiece to come home. It's interesting the next time after Genesis 1 that the image of God is mentioned is in Genesis 5 it says it repeats again that God created Adam and Eve in his image.

And then it talks about Adam's kids. He has a son named Seth and do you know what it says about Seth? Adam bore Seth in his own likeness after his image.

[24 : 41] All of a sudden this idea of the image of God gets tied to sonship. Right? There's a representation and a role in that in being a son in his image in the image of the son and to get back his image that's been marred and stolen what does God have to do?

Well he sends his own son. The original image of creation of what Paul says the first born of all creation the image of the invisible God.

And everything goes great right? Jesus just shows up the image of the invisible God and just grabs all his image bearers and he takes him with no. What happens? Well the Bible tells us even before Jesus comes in Isaiah 52 there's this prophecy about the suffering servant.

And what it says about in verse 14 of Isaiah 52 it says that his appearance was going to be marred beyond human semblance beyond human likeness most commentators point out it's saying that this one who comes the suffering servant he is going to be so beaten and bloodied that you will look at him and you can barely even tell that he's a human being.

That's why he goes to the cross the image of God bloodied and beaten the image marred God and it looks like the kingdom of this world is going to win that sin really does have dominion even over the kingdom of God but while Satan and the rulers of this world thought that they were burying the hope for the image of God instead they were planting it like a seed because in the resurrection the son of God the image of the invisible God gets to redeem and buy back his image this is the way that God's getting back his image it's through Christ's death and resurrection is what Paul talks about in Romans 6 he says now sin and death no longer have what they no longer have dominion that was humanity's job God has dominion and he delegated it to humanity that's what they were supposed to do but things have gone wrong the image of God is messed up and Christ has come to redeem that to buy it back so that things should be the way that they are who are you you're a human being created in the image of God you have an irreducible dignity who are you you're born in a world of sin you've been marred by sin and that's not some abstract theological concept that we're supposed to sit here and go hmm you know this in your own life the marring of sin in this world the things that have been done to you the things that you have done to other people the sting of words from others that tear you down the names you've been called that are echoing in your mind the things people have pointed out about your insecurities about your appearance or your intelligence or the way you speak whatever it is the anger that you felt towards other image bearers the envy of wishing that

[27 : 51] I wish I was actually created like that image bearer and projecting that out into the world of the invisible God the firstborn of all creation and he takes the punishment for image bearers who refuse to reflect God's image into the world who instead of turning their praise towards God want it just for themselves that's what brought the dominion of sin and death and if you come to him in faith and bend the knee and admit this you it's the offer of the gospel you can be who you are like his child treasured redeemed safe forever you know the lengths you would go to in order to get you back and you know you have a dignity that's not just tied up in being a person created in his own image but a son and a daughter of the king and now we just hang out right let's pray sing the last song no last point the image restored amazing way at the same time if you look at

Jesus not only do you see what God is like you see what it means to be human he's fully God and fully man what's the point of it all again it's not just this abstract theological debate at the council of Nicaea and the council of Chalcedon and that's the only thing it's there for no the point towards all of the restoration of the image of God he has bought it back and now he is restoring it there's this Dutch theologian named Herman Bovenk and he's got this great little line it's worth writing down if you're a note taker just memorizing he says grace restores nature grace what does it do it restores nature in Jesus the image is not just redeemed but restored the mirror gets reangled as we put off the old self and put on the new did you hear that earlier in Colossians 3 when we read it verse 10 and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator so Christ likeness and holiness is all about the image of God it's about being who you were created to be 1 Corinthians 15 49 just as we have born the image of the man of dust we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven and now what comes to is this cultural mandate to fill the earth to

create culture to care for creation all these things what comes to now is that there's a great commission not just a cultural mandate right because the way for our image to be restored to be true image bearers we have to become disciples we have to become disciples and have faith in the image of the invisible God and that's what actually starts to change us and what happens then isn't you're just like okay great you know the image was restored I guess I'll just hang out until Jesus comes back no again the image is for you in his creation dominion restored be fruitful and multiply subdue the earth under the dominion of

Jesus if you ever read through the book of Acts there's all this language of fruitfulness and multiplying Acts 6 7 and the word of God continued to increase and the number of disciples multiplied greatly Acts 9 31 so the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it multiplied Acts 12 24 but the word of God increased and multiplied Acts 19 20 so the word of God continued to increase and prevail mightily we want image bearers renewed in the image of their creator dominion restored which means service love humility mercy joy truth these are the heartbeat of the kingdom of God let's put the last slide up this one is a painting called the night watch by Rembrandt the master painter there's a Rembrandt at

Kelvin Grove you can go look at it my only encouragement is you bring a pair of glasses so you can put them like this and go hmm as you're looking at it but this is the night watch by Rembrandt and the reason that there's people standing in front of it is because they're doing this work of restoring the painting the painting been through a lot when the Nazis were coming in Germany and starting to invade different parts of Europe in 1939 they cut the image out and they rolled it up and put it in a cylinder and they kept it there for four years so it was in the image on it and there's work that these people did these artists these restores they came and they carefully tried to restore the image and here

[33 : 22] I think this was in 2019 it's because some of that work of restoration kind of started to go away and there was these different hazy parts starting to show up on the painting and they did this very intense work of restoring this masterpiece and in talking about it these people who had this task you know what they said that they were trying to do whose voice was in their mind as they were doing this work they said we wanted to be faithful to Rembrandt's vision for the painting to restore it to how it looked to its creational intent and you see that that's what we're called to not just the work in ourselves of sanctification but towards one another but we're not just sitting here kind of kind of going hmm I wonder what God would like this to look like we're not just wondering what would it look it looks like and he doesn't just leave us alone but he actually gives us his holy spirit guiding us to be human to be image bearers to reflect the very glory of

God who are you whatever your name is that's important you know what's more you've been created in God's image you bear his image there is an irreducible dignity to each and every one of you who are you you're a sinner you've been born in this world of sin sin has stolen you turned you away from your purpose and identity you're a glorious ruin a misangled mirror you long for something more to know who you are here's the invitation come to Jesus you want a new purpose and a new identity that can't be shaken that won't go out of style or be contingent upon what others say about you open the door and let them in and for the those of us who have done that this is just the beginning this is just the beginning the first chapter of this great story that he's written with every chapter to quote

C.S. Lewis everyone after it being better than the one before