

People bear God's image

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[0 : 00] My name's Dave, I'm one of the pastors here. A warm welcome to you if you're new this morning. If you're not new, a warm welcome to you too.

You're quite welcome as well. Alright, why don't we pray as we come to God's Word. Father, I pray that you would more clearly show each one of us how beautiful you are in the face of Jesus through your Word this morning.

And I pray that you would fill us who know you with a deeper sense of privilege and calling to bring honour and to show who Jesus is in all of our life.

And I pray that your Word and your Spirit might be working powerfully to open any eyes that haven't seen the beauty of Jesus yet.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Could I just ask Sam, would you mind turning this fan off?

[1 : 17] I'm a bit worried. Although it's lovely, my pages are going to go everywhere. Okay. Well, we all know glory when we see it.

Let me just get organised here. One second. Okay. Alright. Let's start again.

We all know glory when we see it. We use that word even still. Like even non-Christians will use that word. Like what a glorious sunrise it was this morning. Did you see the game last night?

That final play? That was glorious. Wow. She's stunning. People at a music concert, just feeling like they're being lifted up, that transcendence.

And it's just like feeling like they're sensing glory in that concert. I think we all know glory when we see it. And if you're struggling with that word glory, just think beauty.

[2 : 28] Awe-inspiring beauty. We all know it when we see it. Sometimes I think when we are enjoying a display of one type of glory, like two great tennis players just battling it out, sometimes a greater glory invades the moment and just surpasses it.

Like when one of the players sacrifices the point by being honest that the opponent's ball actually landed in. That's what makes the headlines the next day.

You think you're watching these great tennis players and all of a sudden such a selfless act, you just hit with a greater glory. Or someone running in a race that they've been training for forever give up the race to help an injured competitor.

You're just like, we all know glory when we see it and sometimes we think we're watching glory and a greater glory just invades the moment. So where can people see the glory, the awe-inspiring beauty of God?

Where can you see it? Surely it's in the starry heavens, isn't it? The heavens declare the glory of God. Now, I've got a little video, if it works, and I'm hoping I don't get in trouble for copyright either from God or my dad.

[4 : 01] You can see the aurora down the bottom. Come on, surely that's where you see the awe-inspiring beauty of God.

But then Genesis 1 tells us, while the stars do declare God's glory, it is most clearly designed to be seen in you.

In me. Genesis 1, God made mankind as the pinnacle of creation, the bridge between heaven and earth.

In 126, we get an insight into the eternal Godhead making their plans. Let us make man in our image after our likeness.

And just so we don't miss how special people are, the word for create, that only God does this sort of creating, not when you do an artwork or something.

[5 : 15] The word for create in 1 verse 1 of Genesis, when he makes everything out of nothing, that special word is used again when animals are made. So animals are obviously special as well.

But then three times when we're made, that word is used. That's Hebrew way of going bold, italics, underline. This is special.

And then in Genesis 2, the Lord breathes breath of life into our nostrils or into Adam's nostrils.

Somehow we're sharing in the spirit of the Lord.

We see Adam ruling over the animals, which is what someone in authority does. Only the parents get to name a child.

We're ruling over the animals. But then the image is incomplete until Eve comes and man and woman together bearing the same image nature of God.

[6 : 14] We see the covenant Lord walking with his people and communicating directly with people, not to animals. So contrary to what our society is saying at the moment, we are not just advanced animals.

We are uniquely made to be like God, to know God and to bring glory to God. It is an incredible privilege to be a human being.

So what does it actually mean to be in the image and likeness of God? How are we different from animals? And at this point, you might have assumptions that you already know the answer, but just take a moment to check those assumptions because there's three traditional explanations in Christian writing and thought.

What is clear from Scripture is that to be human is to be in the image of God. It's universal. It's not to say that someone is greater in the image or less in the image.

It's universal. To be human is to be in the image of God. To be in the image of God is to be human. So that's got to be our reference point. So the first explanation is we're in the image of God because of some capacity within us as human beings.

[7 : 36] So some point to our mind. Yes, animals can think and be trained like rats can be trained to find explosives in the ground.

That's pretty cool. But you don't see rats composing music. I haven't. You don't see dogs playing poker. I'm not advocating for poker, but anyway.

You don't see monkeys debating philosophical questions. So some point to the mind. Because the mind enables us to know God in a way that animals don't, to speak and sing to God and hear him and understand him.

So some point to our mind. Others point to our morality. We've got a moral nature. We are moral agents as we enter our world.

We might try and suppress our conscience, but try as we might, we can't but relate to people and things and everything in a sense of right and wrong.

[8 : 47] Everyone has a deep desire for justice. And this capacity helps us know God's moral purity. He is holy. And it helps us to have real choice, eternally significant choices, where we can choose to obey God or disobey God.

So some look at our moral and spiritual capacity. But to narrow the definition of image of God to our mind or our morality, something within us, there's problems with that.

What becomes of a person's worth and purpose as a human being if they can show no capacity as an unborn baby in the womb or because they're mentally disabled?

Whereas scripture says to be human is to be in the image of God. So there's problems with that view. Then you've got the second and the third definitions, and they're trying to move away from an internal capacity that we have.

The second view is that we are relational beings. As we relate to God and as we relate to one another, that's how you see God.

[10 : 09] Relationships in action. And this has some backing from scripture, doesn't it? Like the two greatest commandments, love the Lord your God with all that you are and love your neighbours as yourself.

You see God when you're relating. But then this one has a few problems as well. How can it be said of us before we knew the Lord, of unbelievers who don't want anything to do with the Lord or who worship a God of their own imagining and not the real Lord, how do they have a relationship with God?

Wouldn't that mean they're not in the image of God if they're not relating to him? The other problem with this view is they try not to describe anything within human nature that says why can man have this relationship and not animals?

So it just seems incomplete at least. The third view, if you're still with me, is that we image God as we rule over creation.

Again, this has support from Genesis 1. The very next verse of being made in the image of God is God saying let them have dominion over the earth. But then what becomes of our image bearing in our old age when we can barely rule our own bodies, let alone contribute?

[11 : 40] And we need to be served. What happens then? Or I think another one I've heard is that Christians identify ruling the world, especially when we're being creative like the creator, when we're doing an artwork or we're solving some problem.

But the problem with that is, does that mean you start being an image of God when you're doing something creative? What about the rest of the time? Have you stopped being the image of God? So let's just recap.

There's three main views. One is some internal capacity, especially our mind and morality. The second view is relationships with God and one another.

Third view is as we rule over the world in a meaningful way. I think the problem with all three of these, not that they're wrong in and of themselves, but they're just too narrow a definition.

They're too incomplete. I think we're helped in Genesis 5, verses 1 to 3, where again Adam and Eve are said to be in the image and likeness of God.

[12 : 59] And then straight after that, we hear that Adam fathered a son in his own likeness after his image and named him Seth.

In what way was Seth like his father Adam? Well, in every way that he was like his father and yet a distinct person.

How do you define that? In what way are we like God? Well, in every way that we are like God, all his attributes that he has shared with us, we are like God.

So how are we in the image of God? In every way that we are like God. And some of you are like, oh, thanks for that. That's such a broad definition. Is that really helpful?

I think it is helpful because it's liberating, because it means you will continually be learning what it means to be in the image of God as you get to know God. It will take all of scripture and all of eternity to be learning what that means.

[14 : 09] I think it's liberating. And I think this father-child picture with Adam and Seth also helps us distinguish us from animals and angels.

Yes, animals display something of the glory of God, but it's probably as different as a father loving a son compared to loving his pet dog.

And there is a great difference. There is a world of difference. Or angels. Angels, Hebrews teaches us, are servants. They're very happy being servants.

That's what they are. They're servants, whereas people are meant to be sons and daughters. So I think it helps in that regard too. So let's beware of identifying the value and purpose of human life to one narrow primary aspect.

It is our moral and mental capacity. It is our relating. It is our ruling over the world. And it's in every other way that we are like the creator. To be in God's image is in every way we are like God.

[15 : 28] But before we get ahead of ourselves, we need to understand the purpose of an image. So yes, we are like God, but what's the purpose of an image?

And this is where Gareth's kids talk has already probably said it better than I can. In ancient Israelite times, kings were spoken of as the image of the gods.

They represented the authority and rule of the gods. They were the gods on the earth, which just tells us how radical this teaching was even in Moses' day.

Not just kings, but the poor, uneducated, powerless nobody represents the king of kings. This is radical stuff. Or think of a statue of ancient idols, of gods.

The physical statue represents the gods. Whereas scripture is saying God is represented at the moment in this earth with over 8 billion living, breathing statues walking around.

[16 : 32] The point of an image, you're probably not going to like this either, is the image. The point of an image is to reflect.

Like a mirror reflecting the light of the sun into the world. People are to represent, to display, to reflect God to others and into the world.

Not display his physical appearance because God is spirit, but display his character, display his purposes for life. His character should be our character.

His purpose for life should be my purpose for life, our purpose in life. As we encounter another human being, we should see in them a beauty, a light, that isn't their own. It is God-like. And if people are representing the Lord, then how you treat people is an extension of how you treat the Lord.

[17 : 39] You can't separate the two. If you consider the parable of the sheep and the goats that Jesus told, how are we going to be judged at the end of time?

Whether you close those who are deprived, whether you visit those who are sick and in prison, what you did or did not do to people, that's what you did to me, says the Lord, or didn't do for me. Because we all represent God, you can't separate relationship with God with how you treat people. The point of an image is to image, to reflect, to represent.

So we are like God in every way that we are like him in order to display God to others so that people see God through us and rejoice in him and glorify him.

And I think this is true as an individual, but I think Scripture talks about it's even more true. I don't know if more true. It's equally true as community. Israel was meant to be a light to the nations.

[18 : 49] The church is meant to be stars in this dark generation as we love one another, Philippians 2 says. So to be in the image of God is to be like God in every way that we are, like a child to a father, so that we reflect God and represent God to one another and into the world, so that others might see God through us and rejoice and give glory to God.

So where do you see the glory of God? Well, because of sin, it's no longer in people. Has sin totally destroyed the image?

Surprisingly, the answer is no. In Genesis 9, after the flood, sin is in the world. Sin is in the world still to the point where murder can occur and God institutes a punishment for murder.

And the basis of the punishment is that people are in the image of God. Murder is going on and yet that kind of sinful person still bears the image of God.

And then in James 3, we see you should not curse people, you should not tear down people with your words, with your lips. Why? Because they're in the image of God. So sin hasn't eradicated the image.

[20 : 17] All people, Christian, non-Christian, are in the image of God still. Like a mirror that's been dropped, it's been shattered, it is fragmented at best.

I picture something like an abstract artwork of a portrait of a face where you're looking at it and you're just like, I think it's human. I'm not quite sure what the person looked like originally. This sinful condition is spoken of in Romans 1. The cause of our distortion of the image is because we've done a swap.

We've done an exchange. Instead of the glory of the immortal God, we're going to worship and serve created things. We've done a swap.

And the result is that all of our humanity is tainted, is disfigured. Our thinking is corrupted by falsehood.

[21 : 19] Our speech now projects gossip and slander and full of pride. And our relationships are marked by selfish ambition rather than self-sacrificial love. Our ruling of the world exploits rather than cultivates.

I picture just what we might call an ordinary fight between two people, a verbal fight. Think of those arrows that we shoot at each other.

Just an ordinary fight that we all do. Even in an everyday spat, you see something of the image because we can formulate ideas in our minds and project words to one another.

There's something of an image there but then it's not light. It's characterised by darkness. It's not life-giving. It's trying to take life away.

So something of the image is still there even as we try and tear each other down. And yet it's so disfigured. I think this sinful condition we've inherited from Adam and Eve is that we desire glory for ourselves, for our own sake, rather than loving the fact that we're reflecting God's glory.

[22 : 48] I think it's like as a statue, as a monument to the greatness of self rather than as a mirror that reflects the greatness of another. I think we try to be a statue to our own greatness.

We want to be the picture of physical beauty. My value, my purpose is because I'm beautiful. Isn't he intelligent? We want people to think.

She is a great mother. I'm so above my classmates. It's not funny. Isn't he powerful? People respect that.

And it can take religious forms. Isn't he a wonderful preacher? Doesn't she pray well? Isn't he so compassionate and sacrificial?

I think we share in Adam and Eve's desire to be a statue of our own greatness rather than reflecting the greatness of another. We exchange the glory of the immortal God for created things.

[23 : 56] We try and reach to the heavens ourselves, but all it does is make us more animal-like. So, with sin, the image hasn't been totally lost, but it is unrecognisable.

It is so distorted. We reflect darkness more than light. So if we don't see God's glory in people anymore, where do we find it?

Well, let's go to 2 Corinthians and we're going to stay there for the rest of the sermon. Here, Paul compares the glory that Moses saw.

Now, Moses got to speak to God directly up on the mountain. and the glory that Moses saw as God revealed himself partially in the law, comparing that to the glory that the apostles saw and that we can see in the face of Jesus Christ.

It's hardly worth comparing. So Exodus 34 tells us of when Moses was out on Mount Sinai and he asked God, show me your glory and if you remember the story, God hides him in the rock and he passes by while declaring his name and Moses only sees the back of God, only sees his back and he is awe-inspiring and Moses didn't realise, he comes down from the mountain, he didn't realise that the reflected glory in his face was like blinding and people were afraid of him.

[25 : 50] He didn't even realise his face was shining he was glowing and so because people were afraid of him he put a cover he put a veil over his face.

So the reflected glory that Moses had is nothing compared to what you and I can have today is Paul's point, nothing. It houses so much greater.

It is a greater light it is more permanent. So without going into all the detail Paul is saying that having the spirit of God dwelling in us to show us Jesus is so much better than having the law because the law can only tell me how far short I've fallen from the glory of God.

In the message about who Christ is and what he's done we don't see God's back we see his face. verse 4 verse 6 For God who said that light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

If you want to see the beauty of the Lord you must look at his son Jesus Christ. He is what it means to be like God to be in the image of God.

[27 : 15] But can he really be that beautiful if so many people in our world don't see Jesus as glorious?

Can he really be that good? Perhaps you've heard the story of Jesus many times yourself and you still maybe you're listening now and you're like yeah I can't wait till church is over I want to get on with life maybe you still haven't seen how appealing he is yet well verse four explains that and it's a warning to you the God of this world talking about Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God I like how John Calvin puts it the sun is no less bright because blind men do not perceive its light it's no less bright the God who made the sun to shine has to also give physical eyes to see it so too spiritually the sun of God is shining bright but if you're not seeing it that's not his problem that's my problem that's your problem you need spiritual eyes you think money and looks and intelligence and power is more beautiful than him you are blind and the religious types of

Jesus day they saw him forgiving sinners the glory of God's grace and they hated it and they wanted the statue of their self righteousness to remain the thing that people worshipped and they were blind to their own need of forgiveness we all start in this condition of being blind to who Jesus is that he would lay down his life for us and if you can if you are a believer here this morning if you can see something of the glory of Jesus there's only one reason for that the God at creation who out of darkness said let there be light and there was light in your heart let there be light and the gospel broke through gave you eyes to see that's the only reason you're a Christian all praise to him that's how we were saved whether it was in a moment or over years took as creative an act at the beginning as in our salvation let there be light and gave us eyes to finally see well where do you see the glory of God you see in the face of the crucified and risen son of

God and now by seeing Christ we who have had our eyes opened we are being increasingly transformed into his image verse 318 and we all with unveiled face the blindness has been removed beholding the glory of glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image for one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit the Spirit's role we're told in

John 16 is to guide us into all truth he wants the spotlight to be on Jesus he wants the scriptures that the Spirit wrote about Jesus for us to understand them so that we see him in the scriptures and our hope is that while yes we are by degree growing in our knowledge of Jesus through the scriptures 1 Corinthians talks about that's still just a dim reflection of

Jesus as good as the word of God is we're looking forward to when we see him face to face directly it says now I know in part then I shall know fully even as I have been fully known when we see him we will be totally like him but until then we should trust that we are being changed degree by degree into the likeness of Jesus as we behold him as we look to him there's no shortcut spiritual maturity you can't shortcut it you can't just get the supernatural gifts of the spirit and suddenly you're a mature Christian no spiritual maturity comes from growing in your knowledge of who Jesus is it's bit by bit what's the point of the image to image for others to see the glory of

[32 : 41] God through us what a privilege what a purpose young or old we are to display in every conversation whatever hardship we're facing at all times we have the privilege of displaying the beauty of God so that others see him that's an amazing purpose even in our weak attempts at trying to tell other people isn't Jesus great the sovereign lord can use those weak words to go let there be light he can use us as we try and make clear truths about Jesus to others before verse 7 we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us

I don't know about you but I think we can fall into the trap of thinking if I'm really advancing in Christ's glory as an individual or as a church then it's going to feel like strength it's going to feel like success and victory that I'm going to have persuasive words that come easily and just win my family member over to know Christ then and there that I'm going to totally get rid of the sin the private sins I'm struggling with totally so that I'm strong to do great things for God that if I remain faithful to Jesus people will respect that but that's not the path that Christ walked it's not the path the apostles walked it's not the path to glory that we walk the path is weakness it is rejection it is suffering it is struggling why well when the world what the world counts as glorious is stripped away and yet we have a peace and a hope and a joy and a love for others that still remains even though other things are gone death is at work in us so that the light of Jesus is more clear what a wonderful what a wonderful purpose there's not one drop of suffering is wasted the Lord can use that for others to see the life of Jesus in us for those he plans to open eyes so how how will people in your family in your social circles how will they see the glory of God through you as we point to

Jesus hear me hear me right it's not us we proclaim we proclaim him as Lord how will people in this church family see the glory of Christ through you as we learn who Jesus is through the scriptures and through how you model him but we'll only do this if we keep our eyes on him and learn to love him more and more and I think it will depend on whose glory we want people to see whether we want to be a statue to our own glory or whether we want people to see through us to the glory of Jesus let me pray so sovereign

Lord I want to praise you for your mercy to each one of us that you have given us eyes to see your son while we were chasing after our own glory and created things you broke in and showed us who you are and I thank you for that and I thank you for such a privileged calling that you want us to individually and together display to the world the death of your son and the life that is found in the death of your son we thank you Lord that you are risen that you have all authority that you can turn the most hardened sinner to yourself and we thank you that you will return and that we will see you face to face and finally we will be in awe of you totally and permanently as you deserve and for our joy in

Jesus name Amen