

How God treats his children

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[0 : 00] Our first reading this morning is from Genesis chapter 1 and starting at verse 26, which can be found on page 2. Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the whole earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit.

You shall have them for food and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life.

I have given every green plant for food. And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

[1 : 33] And there was evening and there was morning the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. Our second reading is from Hebrews chapter 4, verses 1 to 11.

That's on page 1205. That's Hebrews chapter 4, beginning at verse 1. Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

For good news came to us just as to them. But the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest, although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

[2 : 57] For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, and God rested on the seventh day from all his works. And again in this passage he said, They shall not enter my rest.

Since, therefore, it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day.

Today, saying through David, so long afterwards, in the words already quoted, Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works, as God did from his.

Let us, therefore, strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. Andrew, thanks so much indeed for reading.

[4 : 05] Let me add my welcome to you. It's lovely to have you with us this morning. My name is Simon Dowdy. I'm the minister here at Grace Church. Now, please will you turn back to our first reading, so from Genesis, chapter 1 in the Bibles, on page 2.

We're starting a new series of talks today with the title, Identity. What does it mean to be human? Now, I guess it's the kind of question which we might easily dismiss as being of interest only to armchair philosophers.

And yet, just a moment's thought shows that it is a question that we grapple with throughout life. It's the questions that are asked by the teenager.

What does it mean for me to be me, rather than simply the child of my parents? Or the new graduates setting out on their own. Who am I?

What am I going to do with my life as it stretches out ahead of me? Or the new parents as they marvel at the little bundle in their arms. And yet, at the same time, they ask themselves, What is this new life that I'm responsible for?

[5 : 15] What does it mean to be human? Or in the disappointments and adjusted reality of midlife, What is life actually about?

Or in old age, as horizons shrink, What does it mean to be human? In a culture that prizes and values youth and energy?

You may be here this morning as a committed Christian, Or an inquirer, Or a sceptic. I take it the question is no less real. What's it mean to be human? What's it mean to be me?

Who am I? How do I flourish? But it may be that you've been rather puzzled by the title of today's talk, Made to Rest. That sounds good, you say.

But isn't it a rather strange place to start? Well, no. For the simple reason that as we read through the creation account, From Genesis chapter 1 verse 1, To Genesis chapter 2 verse 3, There are two great highlights.

[6 : 18] The first highlight is the creation of mankind, Of men and women. The second highlight is the day of rest.

Which shows that humanity is the pinnacle of creation, While rest is the goal of creation. And if you turn to the outline on the back of the service sheet, You'll see we're going to look at each of those two things in turn this morning.

First of all, humanity, the pinnacle of creation. What's it mean to be human? Genetic research suggests that chimps share between 90 and 95% of human DNA.

A few years ago, that led the National Geographic magazine to proclaim, Darwin wasn't just provocative in saying we are descended from the apes, He didn't go far enough. We are apes in every way.

From our long arms and tail as bodies, To our habitats and temperament. But here's the thing, does DNA explain everything? What's the significance of the 10 to 5% of our DNA, Which is not like chimps?

[7 : 33] After all, we also share 50% of our DNA with bananas. But few would suggest that gets us halfway, In terms of working out what it means to be human. Instead, have a look at Genesis chapter 1, verse 26.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image, After our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, And over the birds of the heavens, And over the livestock, And over all the earth, And over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

That is the key to what it means to be human. It is to be made in God's image. It's repeated, verse 27. So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. That is the key to human identity. Knowing that we are created in the image of God.

You and I are not simply upgraded apes. You know, the next software update in the evolutionary process. Nor are we just a lucky number.

[8 : 43] The result of a random throw of the dice. No. We can only understand what it means to be human, And our true identity in relation to God.

We may share much of our DNA with chimps, But the fact is, They cannot know God, And don't know God. How extraordinary, That God should care for humanity, As he does.

It's what Psalm 8 celebrates. I put verse 4 on the outline. What is man that you are mindful of him, And the son of man that you care for him.

We are made for a relationship with God, Just as a goldfish is made for water. And just imagine a goldfish saying to its owner, I'm fed up with this fish tank.

I'm going to go and explore the big wide world, And discover myself, And get out of this fish tank, And go on a search for my true identity and meaning.

[9 : 46] Well I guess at that point, You need to sit down with your goldfish, Wouldn't you? And have a few straight and honest words. It's the problem of something like mindfulness.

While there may be some use in stopping, To think in the middle of our busy lives, The problem with mindfulness, Is it's entirely inward. It just looks within, For answers, For peace, For meaning, For

purpose, And so on.

Which of course is why, It's simply another fad, Which will come and go. Because actually I can't understand, What it means to be me, What it means to be human, Apart from in relation, To God, And in reference to God.

I don't find the answers by looking, Within, But instead by looking, Upwards. It also means of course, That we don't find our identity, In relationships.

Yes, You and I are made for relationship, We're made male, And female, We'll see that in two weeks time, But we don't discover, Who we are, What it means to be human, Simply through human friendships.

[10 : 51] It's the Bridget Jones syndrome, Isn't it? Life revolves around, Others and her friendships, And how other people think of her, It takes her down, Never ending path, At searching, For the perfect relationship, And yet it's elusive, Each one, Is inevitably disappointing, Because we don't find, Our ultimate sense of who we are, Through friendships, And relationships, Nor do we find it in leisure, Or pleasure, So easy isn't it, To live for leisure, To live for holidays, Or weekends, Or retirement, As if that is the goal, And purpose of life, There was a wonderful cartoon, In the paper, A couple of months ago, Showing a couple, Relaxing in their deck chairs, On a desert island, Paradise, All you could see, Was this island, You know, With the one palm tree, And these two people, On their deck chairs, Drinks in hand, Soaking up the sun, And the caption underneath, Simply read, Oh no,

We're still us, It's why that holiday, Or retirement, Can be so disappointing, So unfulfilling, Because we take ourselves, With us, Yes, I am still, Me, Nor do we find ourselves, In our work, Which in a global city, Like London, Which proclaims, That you are what you do, You are your job, I take it, Is wonderfully, Liberating, It frees us, From the, From the workaholism, Which is so, Endemic, And destroys, People, People's health, And marriages, And families, And friendships, It frees us, From getting our sense, Of worth, And who I am, Through our work, If you're in a dull, Boring job, Or if your career, Has flat lined, You are no less, Human, That's why retirement, Could be so hard, Can't it, For so many people, Because this sense of loss, Loss of my identity, Or you know, The new mum, At work she was valued, At work she felt good, About herself, But now she's just, Changing nappies, And pushing a pram, Is she worth less?

No, God's creation blueprint, Frees us, From the oppression, Of a culture, That says your identity, Is in the job, That you do, And it is oppressive, So then humanity, Is the pinnacle of creation, I discover my identity, What it means to be human, By looking to God, Now that is expressed, Secondly, In rest, The goal of creation, Have a look at Genesis 2, Verses 1 to 3, Thus the heavens and the earth, Were finished, And all the hosts of them, And on the seventh day, God finished his work, That he had done, And he rested on the seventh day, From all his work, That he had done, So God blessed the seventh day, And made it holy, Because on it, God rested, From all his work, That he had done, In creation, Now here's the question,

Why is there a seventh day, At all? I mean, Aren't we done, By the end of the sixth day? The previous verse, Chapter 1, Verse 31, God saw, Everything that he had made, Behold, It is very good, There was evening, And there was morning, The sixth day, Haven't we finished?

[14 : 30] I mean, It's not as if God needs a rest, He doesn't sit down, With a cup of tea, And put his feet up, In front of the telly, And yet actually, The whole of the creation account, From Genesis chapter 1, Verse 1, Has been leading, To this seventh day, So the very first verse, Genesis 1, In the original language, Is just seven words, In the creation account, Seven times, We read, And God saw that it was good, Fourteen times, We're told that God speaks, 35 times, God's name is mentioned, In other words, The Genesis account, Is brilliant practice, If you're trying to learn, Your seven times table, The effect is, That we are drawn, To this seventh day, And unlike every other day, Which is just numbered once, The seventh day is numbered three times, Twice in verse 2, Once in verse 3, As if to underline, Its significance, And what's more,

Unlike the other days, The seventh day is ongoing, It doesn't finish, You see, Look back to chapter 1, Verse 5, Where we're told, At the end of the first day, And there was evening, And there was morning, The first day, It's repeated, At the end of day 2, In verse 8, There was evening, And there was morning, The second day, And again, At the end of every day, Except, The seventh day, Because the seventh day, Is the goal, And destination, Of creation, And now that creation, Is complete, History is ready to begin, And proceed, Just as when you fly, To that holiday destination, You get off the plane, You check into your hotel, You unpack all your stuff, You say to yourself,

Hooray, Let's go and explore, Our holiday's started, Let's see what's out there, And that is precisely, What we see, In the rest of, Genesis chapter 2, Do read, The whole chapter later on, It shows us what rest, What this seventh day, Looks like, Trees that are good for food, And pleasing to the eyes, The centre of riches, And gold, Work that is satisfying, Relationships, Which are harmonious, Unity between man, And wife, It is a picture, Of heaven itself, As mankind, Men and women, Walk with God, In the cool of the day, Far from being repressive, Or restricting, Here is joy and purpose, And pleasure, In the company of each other, And in the company of God, As God places humanity, In a beautiful garden, Full of abundant provision, And under his gracious rule, Here, Is where true human purpose, An identity, Is to be found, In a relationship, With the living God, Now of course, If we're honest,

We know, In our own lives, That we don't enjoy, The perfect rest, Of Genesis chapter 2, The explanation for that, Comes in Genesis 3, Where Adam and Eve, Rebelled against God, Where they're thrown out, Of the garden of Eden, Where they are banished, From God's presence, Flick on to the end, Of Genesis chapter 3, Genesis 3, Verse 23, Therefore the Lord God, Sent him out, From the garden of Eden, To work the ground, From which he was taken, He drove out the man, And at the east, Of the garden of Eden, He placed a cherubim, And a flaming sword, That turned every way, To guard the way, To the tree of life, Now that describes, What all of us, Are naturally like, We are alienated, From God, We no longer enjoy, The perfect rest, We are created, To enjoy, And yet wonderfully, It's not the end of the story, In the book of Exodus, As God gives his people, The ten commandments, The fourth commandment, Is to rest, Exodus 20, Verses 8 and 9, Remember the Sabbath day, To keep it holy, Six days you shall labor, And do all your work, But the seventh day, Is a Sabbath, To the Lord your God, It was meant to be, A reminder to God's people, That their identity, Didn't lie, In their work, It didn't lie, Within themselves, But in God, And it didn't lie, Fundamentally, In this present world, But instead, In the fulfillment, Of God's promises, In the future, Because the whole, Of the Old Testament, Anticipates, A new Adam, Who is sent, From God, Not a rebel, But one who lives, In the perfect image, Of God, Who will rule perfectly, Over his creation, Who will restore, His people, To that position, Of perfect, Rest, That man,

[19 : 38] Is Jesus Christ, Turn on to, Matthew's gospel, Page 984, Matthew chapter 11, As the Lord Jesus says, In Matthew chapter 11, Verse 28, Come to me, All who labor, And are heavy laden, And I will give you rest, Take my yoke upon you, And learn from me, For I am gentle, And lowly in heart, And you will find rest, For your souls, For my yoke is easy, And my burden is light, It's a verse, That's often taken, Simply to mean, That Jesus offers, To help those, Who are feeling tired, You see, The promise is far, Far greater than that, It is a promise, Of true,

Rest, No longer under the, Judgment of God, Where we left Adam and Eve, In the garden, Outside the garden, At the end of, Genesis chapter 3, But instead, Enjoying perfect relationship, With God, Just what we are created for, That's why, Jesus died on the cross, Taking the right, Judgment of God, That we deserve, For our sin, So that those who trusted him, Might be forgiven, Might be part of his people, Both in this world, And in the next, True relationship, With God, Life as it's meant, To be, Me, As I'm meant to be, Is to be found, In Jesus Christ, Alone, It's just what we see, At the end of the Bible, Turn on when you, To Revelation chapter 21, At the end of the Bible, On page 1250, And here is the Apostle John,

And his, His revelation, Of what the, New heavens, And the new earth, Look like, Verses 1 to 5, Then I saw, A new heaven, And a new earth, For the first heaven, And the first earth, Had passed away, And the sea was no more, And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, Coming down, Out of heaven from God, Prepared as a bride, Adorned for her husband, And I heard a loud voice, From the throne, Saying, Behold, The dwelling place of God, Is with man, He will dwell with them, And they will be his people, And God himself, Will be with them, As their God, He will wipe away, Every tear from their eyes, And there shall be no more, Neither shall there be mourning, Nor crying, Nor pain anymore, For the former things have passed away, And he was, Who was seated on the throne, Said, Behold, I am making all things new, Now,

Revelation doesn't, Doesn't use the language of rest, But it certainly describes rest, It is a picture of those, Who belong to Jesus, Living in perfect relationship, With God, In the new creation, And just as Genesis chapter 2, Assures us, That God is the great finisher, He finished his first creation, So one day, He will bring to completeness, His new creation, The new heavens, And the new earth, So, Why don't we spend the rest of our time, Thinking about, Some of the implications, First of all,

For those of us here this morning, Who have yet to put our trust, In Jesus Christ, God has issued, A wonderful invitation, An open invitation, He invites us to enter, His rest, It's why we had that second reading, This morning from Hebrews, Chapter 4,

Verse 1, Therefore, While the promise of entering, His rest still stands, Verse 3, For we who have believed, Enter that rest, Verse 11, Let us therefore strive, To enter, His rest, Imagine throwing an old car, Just rusting away, In a lock up garage, Somewhere, Hasn't been driven for years, Completely unable, To fulfill, The purpose, For which it was created, And then someone takes it on, They buy it on eBay, They give it a new engine, There's a long, Restoration project, And finally, A glorious new paint job, And it is wonderfully restored, To its original, Created purpose, That is precisely, What happens when we put our trust, In Jesus Christ, And begin to follow, Him, We enter God's rest, We are restored, To our original,

[24 : 53] Created purpose, To live in relationship, With God, And if you're here this morning, And you've never done that, Or you've never thought about doing it, Then I'd love to, Chat to you over coffee, About how you might, Do so, What about those of us, Who have put our trust in Jesus, Well strikingly, Of all the ten commandments, The only one the New Testament, Doesn't repeat, Is the one about the Sabbath, In other words, There may still be some wisdom, In having a day of rest, But it's no longer a command, It's not a matter of, Obedience, Because if you and I, Belong to Jesus Christ, We have entered God's rest, And therefore, Just as every single day, In the Garden of Eden, In Genesis chapter 2, Was a day to experience, God's rest, So for those now,

Who belong to Jesus Christ, Every day, Not just one day in seven, But every day, Is a day to experience, And enjoy, And express, That rest, That rest, In other words, Every day, We're to express the fact, That life is not ultimately, About this creation, And this world, But instead, The world to come, Having our sights, Firmly fixed, There, And that we're made, Not to live for ourselves, Or for friendships, And relationships, Or for leisure, And pleasure, Or for work, But we are made, For God, Every day is a day, To live for Jesus, As Lord, And King, Every day, To live, With that clear, Future, Focus, And perspective, Let me say, It is gloriously liberating, Wonderfully so, Because it means, You can be a, Well perhaps a failure,

Or certainly very ordinary, In the eyes of the world, Or in the eyes of, Your wider family, Or even in terms of, What you thought you might get out of life, And yet if you belong to Jesus Christ, Your life is on track, Is that not a wonderful thing?

There may be plenty of things, You know, Five, Ten, Twenty years ago, Which you would have loved to have done, And achieved, You know, Perhaps you long to be married, Or to have children, Or perhaps a different set of life circumstances, You may feel that your life is in ways disappointing, Or your job unfulfilling, Perhaps your health is failing, Or perhaps you just feel very ordinary, And yet if you know Jesus Christ, And the forgiveness that he brings, You have been restored, To the purpose for which you were created, To know him, To live for him, To serve him, And to enjoy him, Both in this world, And the next.

Let's spend a few moments in reflection, And I shall then lead us in prayer, So God created man in his own image, In the image of God he created him, Heavenly Father, We thank you so much for the extraordinary privilege, We have as men and women, As those who are created in your image, To know you, We praise you for the Lord Jesus, For his death on the cross, The one who invites us, Into his rest, We praise you, Heavenly Father, For the new creation, To come, Even better, Than that first creation, We're sorry, Heavenly Father, When we see our identity, In our, Either within just ourselves, Or in our work, Or in leisure, Or in plenty of other things, And we pray instead, We would be those, Who first and foremost,

[28 : 54] See our identity, In relation to you, And to the Lord Jesus, Who would keep our eyes focused, On the new creation, And we ask it, In Jesus name, Amen.