

Made to rest

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[0 : 0 0] This morning's reading is coming from Genesis chapter 1 and we'll be starting at verse 26 and this is 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 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 all 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. And there was evening and there was morning the sixth day.

[1 : 3 7] 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. The second reading is Genesis chapter 2 verses 4 to 17, which can be found on page 2 of the Church Bibles.

Genesis chapter 2 verses 5 to 18, And there was no man to work the ground.

And a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground. Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

And the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east. And there he put the man whom he had formed.

[3 : 1 5] And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden.

And the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden. And there it divided and became four rivers.

The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good.

Pdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gion. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush.

And the name of the third river is the Tigris which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

[4 : 22] The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden.

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Ed, thanks very much indeed for reading for us. Let me add my welcome. My name is Simon Dowdy. I am the lead pastor here at Grace Church. And it is lovely to have you with us this morning. Please do keep Genesis open.

And I am going to pray and ask for God's help as we respond and hear his word this morning. Let's pray together. Then God said, Let us make man in our image.

Heavenly Father we thank you for the wonderful privilege of being made in your image. The image of the living God. And we pray that just as you spoke in power in creation.

[5 : 35] We pray that now as we hear your words proclaimed. Please would you indeed be at work in power again by your spirit. Please help us to hear your words and to take it to heart.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, I wonder if you've come across the BBC programme, Who Do You Think You Are?

It's now in its 15th series. And the format is simple, as different celebrities discover the surprises in their family histories and backgrounds.

Most recently the actress Michelle Keegan from Our Girl discovered that the birth certificate of her great-grandmother Nora had been signed by no less illustrious registrar than Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the British suffragette movement.

Her great-great-grandmother had been a friend of Emmeline Pankhurst, a fellow suffragette, and Emmeline Pankhurst was a registrar in Manchester at the time. But the whole question of our identity and who we are runs very deep, doesn't it, in each one of us.

[6 : 46] Hence this series of talks, these four Sundays, on identity, what it means to be human. But we're going far deeper than simply thinking about our ancestors.

We're asking the fundamental questions of identity, what's it mean to be me? We saw last week that we are made to rest, to know God, to enjoy the blessings of relationship with God.

As Augustine famously said, You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. This week, we are made to work.

And you'll see if you turn to the outline on the back of the service sheet that our method this morning is going to be exactly the same as it was last week. So firstly, we're going to look at work in creation. But we cannot leave it there because you and I don't live in the Garden of Eden.

Which means that secondly, we need to consider the effects of the fall and Adam and Eve's rejection of God's good rule and the effect of that on work. And then thirdly, because you and I live after the great turning point of history, the arrival of Jesus Christ into the world, we need to think about how the coming of him then shapes work.

[8 : 07] Hence, there's three headings, work in creation, work under curse, and work in Christ. First of all, work in creation. And have a look again at Genesis chapter 1, verse 26.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness. We saw last week that humanity is created in the image of God.

And that is repeated in verse 27. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. But what does that mean exactly?

Well, notice, will you, what comes immediately after the statement that we are made in God's image, verse 26. 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.

And that is unpacked for us further in verse 28. And God blessed them and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the 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.

[9 : 16] You see, what is this beautiful new creation crying out for? Men and women who will subdue it and who will rule it. Notice, will you, just in these verses, how closely being made in the image of God is tied to the idea of ruling.

God, the ruler of the universe, and he's made us creatures who resemble him in that we share that rule with him.

We rule under him. And we begin to see what that looks like in verses 29 to 30. And as I read these verses, see if you can spot the difference.

See if you can spot the difference between mankind and the animals. Verse 29. And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all 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.

[10 : 28] And it was so. What's the difference between mankind and the animals? Anyone spot it? The answer is very small.

Seeds. Seeds. That's surprising, isn't it? But of course, seeds imply agriculture. They're mentioned twice even in verse 29, just to underline their significance for us, because they imply agriculture.

Whereas animals forage and graze and hunt for food, we farm for food. And that is the beginning of exercising God's rule. It leads in chapter 2, verse 15, to man being sent out for his first day at work.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. By Genesis chapter 4, we have the start of livestock farming, the development of music and culture, the beginnings of technological progress, and it's not long before whole cities have been built.

God has given mankind the task of ruling his world and doing so under his ultimate rule and authority. That is expressed in work.

[11 : 46] After all, God is a worker. He made the world. He sustains the world day by day. So we who are made in his image will too be workers.

Work is basic to our existence. And what it means to be human. The often derided Protestant work ethic is in fact a creation work ethic.

Well, what are the implications? Well, firstly, of course, it means that God must be number one at work. There can be no place for compartmentalization, whereby I'm prepared to have God perhaps as number one at home at work or school.

It's all too easy to be like the founder of McDonald's who claimed to be a Christian, and yet when asked what he believed in, he said, I believe in God, family, and McDonald's, and in the office that order is reversed.

Contrast that with another big American fast food restaurant chain, Chick-fil-A, which I don't think sadly has yet reached across the pond, but I live in hope.

[12 : 57] Founded by a Christian, the mission statement of the company simply reads, to glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us.

It is very different. And of course, it begs the question, doesn't it, what is your personal mission statement at work? Who's number one?

Your boss? Your ego? Your urgent to-do list? Your long-term plan for your career advancement?

Or God? Like the friend I was talking to the other day, he was telling me why he has his daily Bible reading each morning before he goes to work, God first, he said.

You and I live in an age and generation which puts work first and has made work into an idol. If that is something which we have done, and I guess there are a number of us, I guess, who have done that in this room, then we need to repent.

[14 : 07] It is an idol. Or perhaps as parents, perhaps we've made academic success getting the right grades, getting our children to the right university, into an idol.

It's what our culture does. If we've done that, we need to repent of it. The second implication is that work is good.

But notice, will you, that all work is good. Because the Bible sees work as being something much, much bigger than we do. So we think about work, don't we?

And immediately we're thinking of what we do between nine to five, or eight to eight, and the stuff that we are paid to do. Which leads to huge distortions.

You know, a culture which undervalues the importance of mums staying at home, for example, who are working to look after their own children. Or the distortion that undervalues manual work, as if rubbish collectors aren't equally important in exercising dominion and rule over God's creation.

[15 : 16] Or the distortion that can see someone pursuing excellence in their paid work, such that all their colleagues say how wonderful they are, but then completely ignore any other responsibilities which they may have outside of that.

So, you know, at home they're simply passive and expect to be waited upon. Or at church, they're just spectators. Or the distortion which assumes that retirement is about not working and is about endless leisure and travel.

And it is, of course, why those so often who take early retirement and dream of endless leisure and travel and all the rest of it and putting their feet up actually often end up being so miserable because God has made us to be workers.

So, work in creation. Secondly, work under curse because, of course, you and I don't live in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis chapter 3, we see Adam and Eve rebel against God.

They reject God's good rule over them. The result is God's right and good judgment. They are both cursed. And notice the way they are cursed, they are cursed in their primary areas of work.

[16 : 33] Chapter 3, verse 16. To the woman, God said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing.

In pain, you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. From now on, her family life will be spoiled.

That phrase, I will multiply your pain in childbirth, no doubt in the first instance refers to the pain of childbearing. But perhaps that next line, in pain you shall bring forth children, hints that actually the whole process of having children and bringing them up is in view.

It's such a blessing to have children and yet what heartaches go with it. One of life's most sublime joys will also cause the woman some of her deepest worries and sorrows.

As for the man, verse 17, and to Adam God said, because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat it. Cursed is the ground because of you.

[17 : 46] In pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

For out of it you are taken, for you are dust and to dust you shall return. Notice that from now on, work will be painful, verse 17.

The ground will be cursed. In pain, you shall eat of it. It will be frustrating, verse 18. Thorns and thistles, failed crops, pests, diseases, endless weeding.

Verse 19, it will be plain hard work. By the sweat of your face, you will eat bread. Now, you don't need to be a farmer, do you, to relate to this? Workplace politics, crash computers, missed meetings, trains that don't work, repetitious boredom, misunderstandings, difficult colleagues, difficult clients.

All because you and I live in a fallen world that has turned its back on its creator. The result? Work becomes yet another sphere in which human sin is expressed.

[19 : 00] As men and women try to achieve their own self-centered goals. Injustice, exploitation, ruthless ambition, dishonesty, greed, everything you're going to see, those who are going to the office tomorrow morning, all the results of sin.

Work is a daily reminder that the world we live in, that this world is not the world it was in creation. that we live in a world that is under God's judgment.

So what are the implications of that? Well, I guess we need to have right expectations of work. Here's an advert for what sounds like the perfect job. Fast-growing, active and vibrant office seeks able and energetic young person with vision and insight to order and categorize resources.

It sounds pretty good, doesn't it? What are they looking for? A filing clerk. Now, I don't have a downer on filing clerks but I guess it makes the point, doesn't it, that if you take a job simply because you've been taken in by the advert or because you've been conned by the recruitment consultants who tells you that it's going to be a wonderful job and that you won't have any of the frustrations in this new job of your current job, then you will very, very quickly become disillusioned and thoroughly so.

If we do find ourselves in satisfying jobs, then praise God. But if we don't, it needn't be a cause for concern. We certainly shouldn't look for a new job just because the current one is frustrating because the next one will be frustrating as well.

[20 : 48] While to seek the perfect job, which perhaps we imagine will be satisfying and fulfill our potential and so on, is to go on a completely wild goose chase.

We won't find it for the simple reason that God hasn't designed work in a post-Genesis 3 world to be like that.

It will always be frustrating. And yet, just a moment's reflection, of course, shows us, doesn't it, how wonderfully liberating that is.

Because it means that we are set free from the endless search for the perfect job. Set free from thinking, you know, if only I had his job, if only I had her job, then life would be a dream.

Set free from gazing endlessly at the greener grass on the other side of the fence. set free from the tyranny of seeking my identity in the paid job that I do.

[21 : 59] Here's a question. What's the most significant or perhaps the most satisfying, what's the most satisfying job that you could imagine? Just have a ponder, what's the most satisfying job you could imagine?

Fix it in your mind. Well, how about a king? And no ordinary king at that. The king of a nation at the time was the most envied nation in the world.

Sounds like a great job. But listen to King Solomon describing his work in Ecclesiastes chapter 2. So I hated life because what is done under the sun was grievous to me for all is vanity and a striving after the wind.

I hated all my toil for which I toil under the sun. All of it is meaningless for all his days are full of sorrow and his work is a vexation.

It's why last week's talk was so important. If you weren't here last week, if you've missed it, then do listen to it. online because to live in a culture which says that you find your identity in your work or for those who are at school that you find your identity in the right exam results or the right place at university or whatever, that is oppressive to live under that kind of burden.

[23 : 22] It is a weight that work was never designed to bear. It will inevitably lead to disappointment.

It's why actually some of us know what a blessing it can be to lose a job or not to get that promotion or actually just to find work plain frustrating or not to get those exam grades or not to get to that university because it reminds us of what we saw last week.

You and I are made for a relationship with God to know the Lord Jesus. I find my true identity what it means to be me in him not through the paid employment that I do not through exams that I get not through the university place that I go to and so on.

It is wonderfully liberating. It is completely counter-cultural it's completely the opposite of what people will talk about at parents drinks evenings for those who go to those kinds of things but it is wonderfully liberating.

Work in creation work under curse thirdly work in Christ because just as last week we saw that Jesus Christ fulfills the promise of rest so this week we're going to see that Jesus Christ is the ruler that the world longs for.

[24 : 56] You see what happens to this language from Genesis chapter 1 this language of dominion and rule as we then go through the Bible well it's picked up in Psalm 8 which considers the place of mankind in creation I put Psalm 8 verses 5 and 6 on the outline you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor you have given him dominion over the works of your hands you have put all things under his feet and yet when we come to the New Testament the remarkable thing is that Genesis chapter 1 and Psalm 8 are not used to refer to our rule over creation rather they are used to refer to the rule and dominion of Jesus Christ so for example Ephesians chapter 1 verses 22 speaks of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead the one who is now seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and that

God has put all things under his feet and I've put some other references there on the outline after all the anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire is a reminder isn't it that actually we're not very good rulers of God's world so often we rule for our own benefit or for short term profit rather than for the benefit of others or just think of David Attenborough's Blue Planet series as we saw the catastrophic impact of humanity on God's creation back in Genesis chapter one what the world was crying out for was more people more laborers for the garden but actually in a post Genesis three world that's not going to solve the problem is it I mean just living in a big city like London shows that what happens when you put a whole bunch of sinners millions of them together in one place what the effects of sin are multiplied now what the world is crying out for is not more people but a new humanity a renewed humanity humanity you see imagine for a moment if David

Attenborough had interviewed the creation rather than just kind of talking about it had been able to interview the creation how would those interviews have gone oceans you know what do you really need what is it you long for a ban on plastics perhaps no David what we are longing for is a renewed humanity coral reefs what are you longing for perhaps a ban on mass tourism no what we desperately need is a whole new humanity or if David Attenborough had interviewed turtles and sea life and so on what are you looking for a ban perhaps on industrial scale fishing no what we need is a whole new humanity it's precisely what Romans chapter 8 verse 19 says I put it there on the outline for the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God because when

Jesus Christ returns on the final day those who belong to him will share his rule with him in the new creation the new heavens and the new earth now the implications of this for work are simply enormous because it means that for those of us who belong to Jesus all of life is lived under the rule of King Jesus and his purpose for us is to demonstrate his rule to others all of life lived under the rule of King Jesus his purpose for us in the whole of our lives whatever we're doing is to demonstrate his rule to others which of course is why the gospel accounts close not by repeating that first creation mandate to rule and to multiply but instead with a new mandate term we'll lead to

Matthew chapter 28 familiar verses perhaps but important verses as well Matthew chapter 28 on page 1007 Matthew chapter 28 verses 18 to 20 here Jesus final words before he ascended to heaven to his disciples verse 18 Jesus came and said to them all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me he is the ruler he is the one who fulfills Genesis chapter 1 the mandate to rule to have dominion go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you and behold I am with you always to the end of the age if we have put our trust in Jesus

[30 : 36] Christ our work now comes under the umbrella of this great commission which of course gives paid work any work the most enormous significance because it is yet another sphere of our lives in which we can demonstrate the most important thing our world needs to know that Jesus Christ is Lord to do that by the way we go about our work by the way we relate to colleagues and clients to demonstrate that all authority belongs to Jesus and to seek as we have opportunity to explain the message of Jesus that actually Jesus who is Lord is the answer to this world's problems that he died on the cross so that we can be forgiven by God and belong to him as his people restored to our original creation purpose he will return there will be a new heavens and a new earth just as the work of the stay at home mother also comes under the umbrella of this great commission just as the work of the retired

Christian also comes under this umbrella of the great commission because this is the work that Jesus Christ is committed to doing in his world and you and I have the wonderful privilege the amazing privilege of being part of that in short you see Jesus Christ redeems our work he makes it something significant and meaningful far from being a small self-centered thing which is about little me and pursuing my ambitions and my career he transforms it he makes it about serving king Jesus and his purposes for his world let's have a few moments quiet and then I'll lead us in prayer all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me heavenly father we praise you very much indeed that

Jesus Christ through his resurrection from the dead is the ruler the lord and we praise you heavenly father for the way in which this great commission completely redeems work and saves work from being something which is simply self-centered and therefore heavenly father we pray for all of us in the work that we do this week whether it's paid or unpaid whether it's a job we go into away from home or whether it's at home or here in Dunwich those who go into school whatever it is we pray heavenly father please would you help us to do so knowing that Jesus Christ is lord please help us to live with Jesus Christ as lord in the work that we do and please would you grant us opportunities to speak of him who is lord and we ask it in Jesus name amen